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Czeslaw Milosz, Geoffrey Wolff Features
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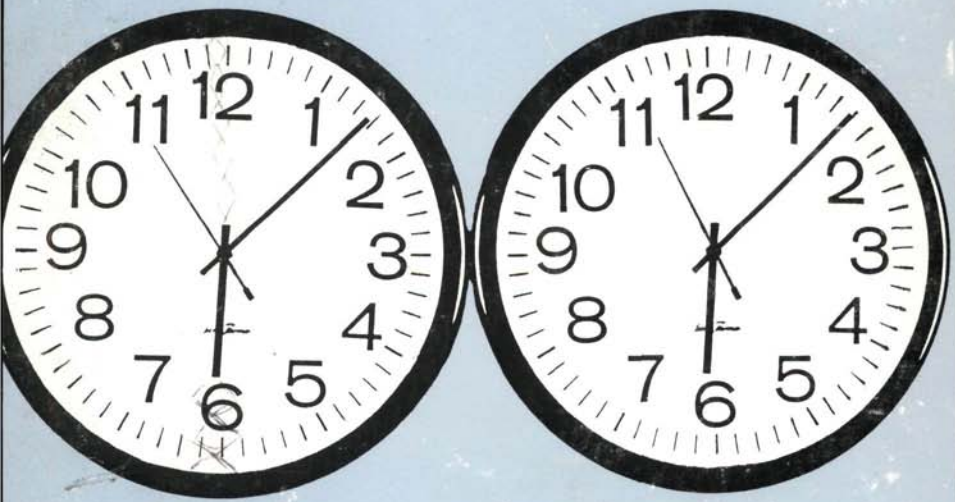

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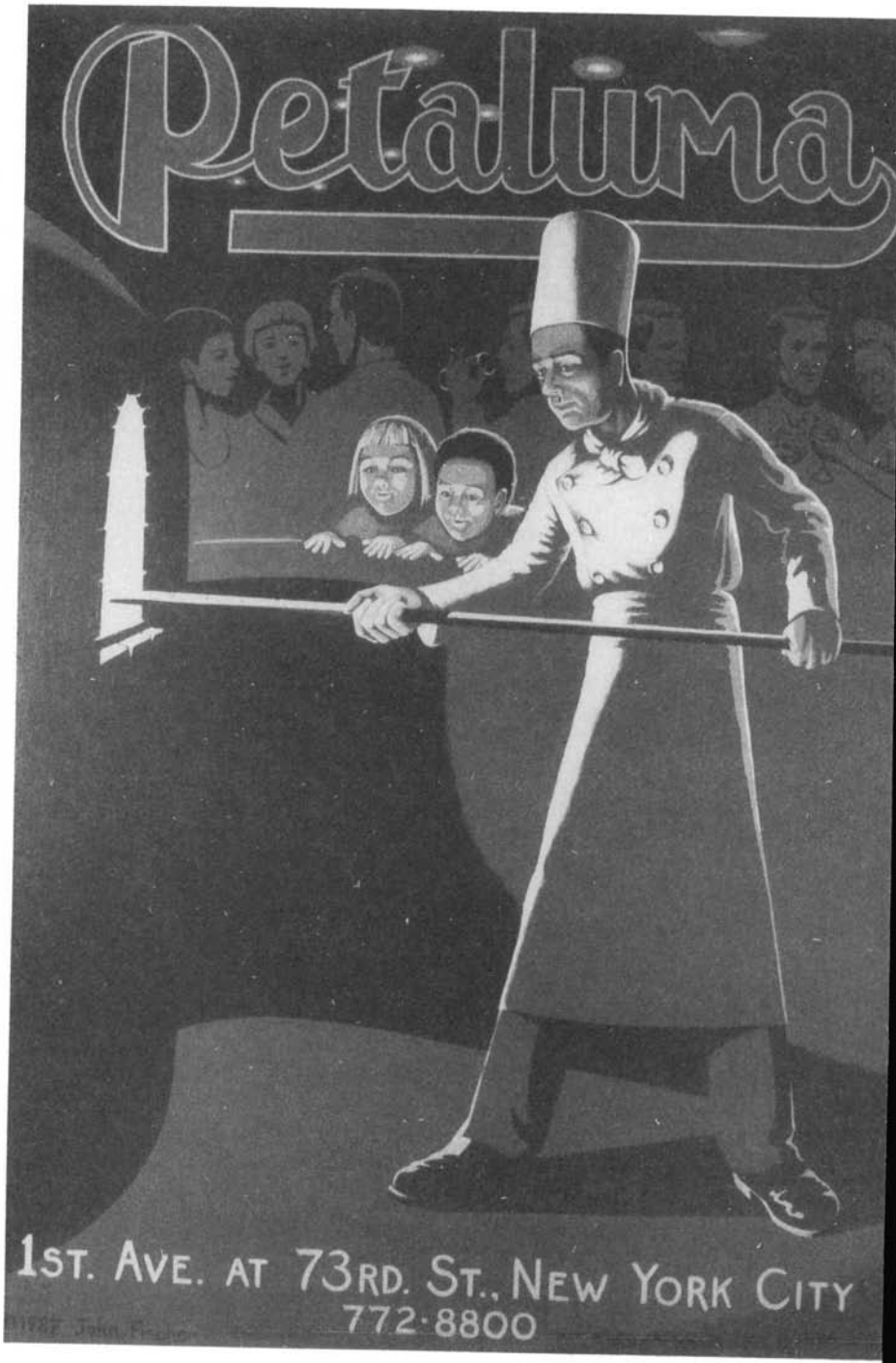

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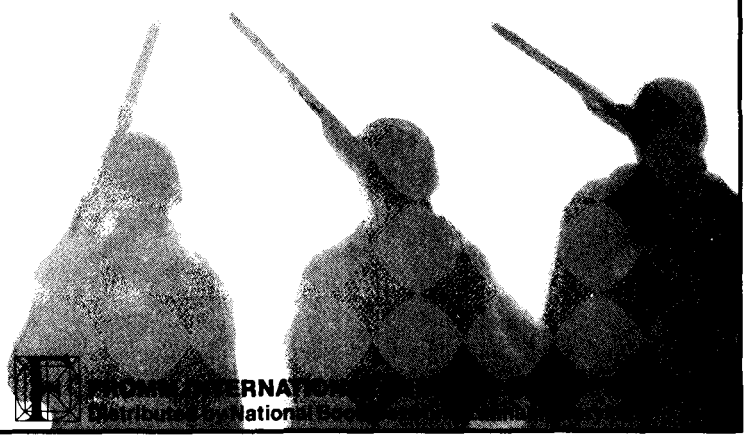

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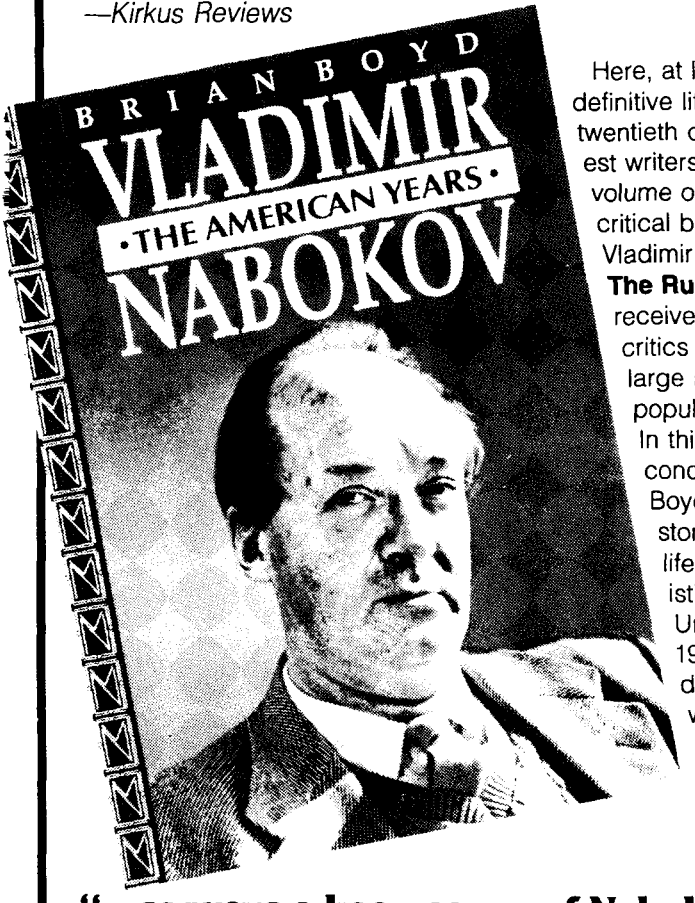

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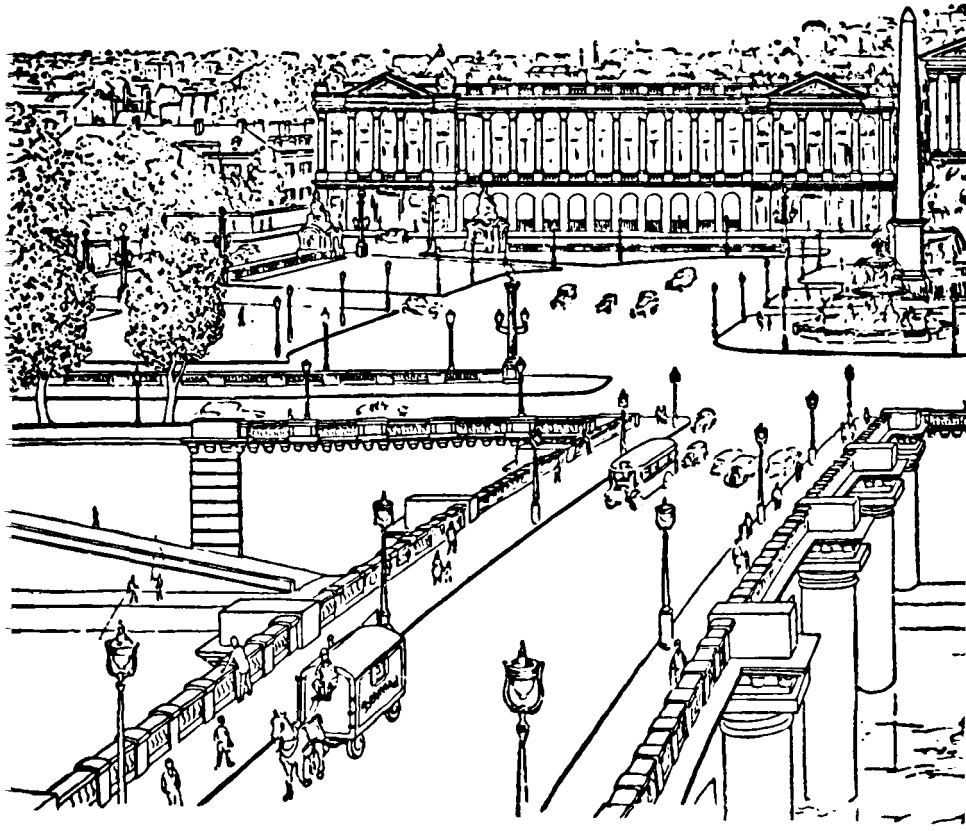

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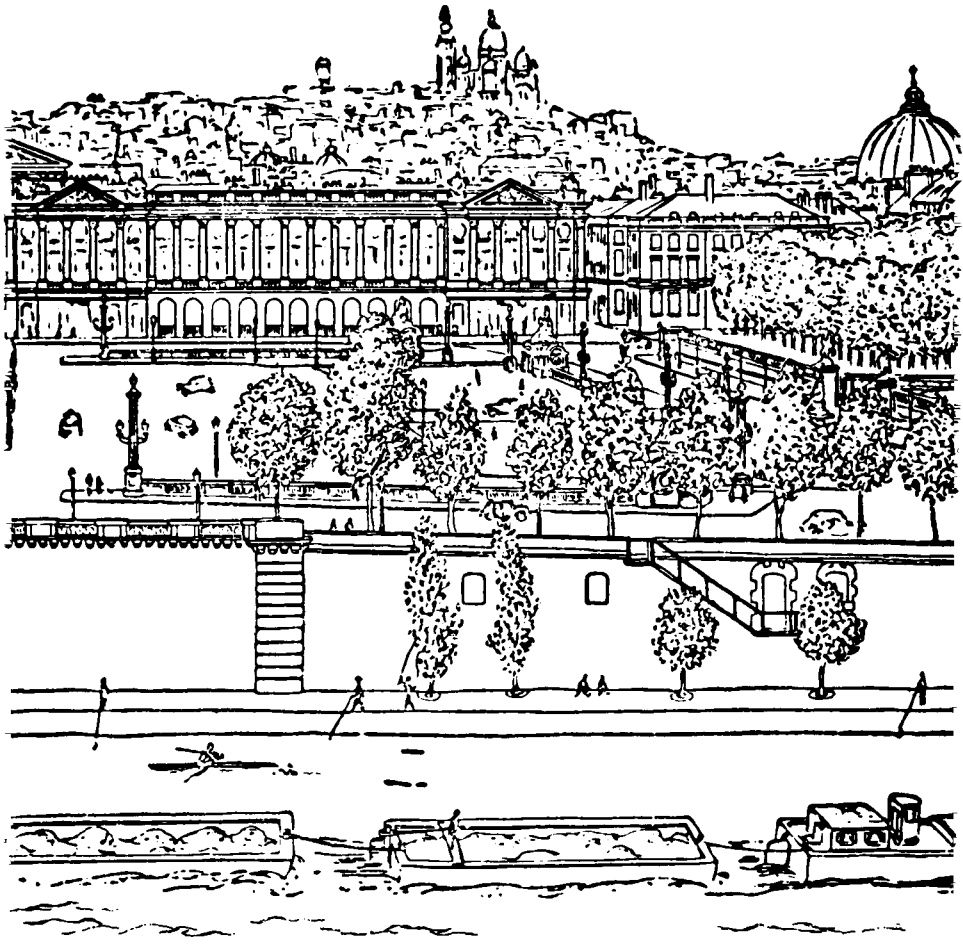

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A Roadside Resurrection

Larry Brown

Story opens, Mr. Redding is coughing in a cafe by the Yocona River, really whamming it out between his knees. He's got on penny loafers with pennies in them, yellow socks, madras shorts, a reversible hat and a shirt that's faded from being washed too many times. His wife, Flenco, or Flenc, as he calls her, is slapping him on the back and alternately sucking her chocolate milk shake through a straw and looking around to see who's watching. She's got a big fat face, rollers in her hair, and she's wearing what may well be her nightgown and robe. Fingernails: bright red.

"Damn!" Mr. Redding coughs. "Godamighty . . . damn!"

Flenco hits him on the back and winces at his language, sucking hard on her straw and glancing around. Mr. Redding goes into a bad fit of coughing, kneels down in the floor heaving, tongue out and curled, veins distended on his skinny forearms, hacking, strangling, and the children of the diners are starting to look around in disgust.

"Oh," he coughs. "Oh shit. Oh damn."

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Mr. Redding crawls back up in the booth and reaches into his shirt pocket for a Pall Mall 100, lights it, takes one suck, then repeats the entire scenario above. This goes on three times in thirty minutes.

Customers go in and out and people order beers and drink them at the counter on stools, but Mr. Redding lies back in the booth while his wife mops his feverish forehead with wetted paper towels brought by a waitress from the kitchen, along with another milk shake just like the last one. The hair on Mr. Redding's forearms is dark and scattered like hair on a mangy dog just recovering, and his sideburns sticking out from under the reversible cap are gray. Twenty years ago he could do a pretty good imitation of Elvis. Now he's washed up.

"Oh crap," he says. "Oh shit. Oh hell."

Flenco mops him and sops up his sweat and sucks her big round mouth around the straw and looks at people and pats him on the back. Truckers come in with their names on their belts and eat eggs and ham and wash down pills with coffee and put their cigarettes out in their plates, stagger back outside and climb up into their sleepers. Flenco looks down the road and wonders what road she'll be on before long.

"Oh shit," Mr. Redding wheezes.

Miles away down the road a legendary young healer is ready to raise the roof on a tent gathering. Sawdust is on the floor and the lights are bright and a crippled boy in a wheelchair has been brought forward to feel his healing hands. The boy lies in his chair drooling up at the lights, hands trembling, the crowd watching on all sides, spectators all piled up along the back and sides and others peeking in the opened opening, some lying on the ground with their heads stuck up between the tent pegs. The crippled child waits, the mother trembling also, nearby, hands clasped breastwise to the Holy Father Sweet Mary Mother of Saints heal my child who was wrong from the womb Amen. The lights flicker. The

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healer is imbued with the Spirit of God which has come down at the edge of this cotton field and put into his fingers the strength of His love and healing fire. Outside bright blades of lightning arch and thunderclouds rumble in the turbulent sky as the healer goes into his trance. His fine dark hair is sleek on the sides of his head and he cries out: "Heeeeeal! Heal this boy, Lord! Heal him! Dear sweet merciful God if You ever felt it in Your heart to heal somebody heal this boy! This boy! This one right here, Lord! I know there's a bunch of 'em over there in darkest Africa need healing too Lord but they ain't down on their knees to You right now like we are!"

The healer sinks to his knees with these words, hands locked and upflung before him. Ushers are moving slowly through the crowd with their plates out, but nobody's putting much into the plates yet because they haven't seen the boy get up and walk.

"Lord what about Gethsemane? Lord what about Calvary's cross? Lord what about Your merciful love that we're here to lay on this child? There's his mama, Lord. I guess his daddy's in here, too. Maybe all his brothers and sisters."

"He's a only child," the mama whispers, but nobody seems to notice. The rain has started and everybody's trying to crowd inside.

"Neighbors? I don't believe there's much faith in this house tonight. I believe we've done run into a bunch of doubting Thomases, folks who want to play before they pay. Maybe they think this ain't nothing but a sideshow. Maybe they think this boy works for me. Because I don't believe they're putting in any money to further our work."

The ushers make another pass through the crowd and collect six dollars and fifty-two cents. The boy lies in the wheelchair, legs dangling. This child has never walked before. The mother has told the healer his history. He was born with spinal meningitis, his heart outside his body, and she said God only gave him one kidney. She

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said on the day she goes to her grave she will still owe hospital bills on him. The healer can see that the congregation thinks nothing is going to happen. He can almost read their faces, can almost read in their countenances the unsaid accusations: *Ha! Unclean! Prove yourself! Make him walk!*

The healer comes down from the podium. The fire of God is still in him. The wheels of the wheelchair are mired in the sawdust. The mother has already begun to feel what has come inside the tent. She faints, falls over, shrieks gently. An uncle stands up. The healer lays his hands on.

"Now I said *heal!* I don't give a damn! About what's happening over there in Saudi Arabia! I don't care what else You got on Your mind! You got to heal this boy! Either heal him or take him right now! Heal him! Or take him! We don't care! He's with You either way!"

The child wobbles in the wheelchair. The healer digs his fingers down deep into the flesh. More people stand up to see. The mother wakes up, moans and faints again. The lightning cracks overhead and the lights go out and then come back on dim. The ushers are moving more quickly through the crowd. An aura of Presence moves inside the tent to where everybody feels it. The child grips the armrests of his chair. His feet dig for purchase in the sawdust. He cries out with eyes closed in a racked and silent scream.

"Yeah!" the healer shouts. "Didn't believe! Look at him! Watch him walk!"

The boy struggles up out of the chair. People have come to his mother's side with wet handkerchiefs and they revive her in time to witness him make his stand. He rises up on his wasted legs, the healer's hands octopused on his head.

"Heal! Heal! Heal! Heal! Heal! Heal! Heal!"

The boy shoves the hands away. The mother looks up at her son from the dirt. He takes a step. His spine is straight. He takes another step. People are falling to their

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knees in the sawdust. They are reaching for their purses and wallets.

Mr. Redding has to be taken outside because he is bothering the other customers. Flenco lets him lie on the seat of the truck for a while and fans him with a Merle Haggard album.

"Oh shit," Mr. Redding says. "Oh arrrrgh."

"It's gonna be all right, baby," Flenco says.

Mr. Redding is almost beyond talking, but he gasps out: "What do . . . you mean . . . it's . . . gonna . . . be . . . all right?"

"Oh, baby, I heard he'd be through here by nine o'clock. And they say he can really heal."

"I don't . . . believe . . . none of that . . . *bull*shit!"

Mr. Redding says that, and goes into great whoops of coughing.

A lot of money in the plates tonight. The mission can go on. But some helpers have wives back home, trailer payments have to be met, others want satellite dishes. The healer requires nothing but a meal that will last him until the next meal. He gives them all the money except for the price of steak and eggs at a Waffle House and heads for the car. The road is mud. The tent is being taken down in the storm. The memory of the woman is on him and he doesn't feel very close to God.

"Oh shit," Mr. Redding says. "Oh damn oh hell oh shit."

"Baby?" Flenco says. "Don't you think you ought not be cussing so bad when you're like this?"

"Li . . . iii . . . iiike what?" Mr. Redding spews out.

"When you're coughing so bad and all. I bet if you'd quit smoking them cigarettes you wouldn't cough so bad."

She pats him on the back like she saw the respiratory therapist do and feels she knows a little about medicine.

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"Oh crap," Mr. Redding says. "Oh *shit!*"

Flenco mops his sweaty head and fans hot air with her hand. She has heard that the healer drives a long black Caddy. They say he refuses to appear on network television and will not endorse products. They say he comes speeding out of the dusty fields in his dusty black car and they say the wind his machine brings whips the trousers of the state troopers before they can get into their cruisers and take pursuit. They say he lives only to heal and that he stops on the roadsides where crippled children have been set up and where their mothers stand behind them holding up cardboard placards painstakingly printed HEALER HEAL MY CHILD. They say that if the state troopers catch up with him while he is performing some miracle of mercy on one of God's bent lambs, the people pull their cars out into the road and block the highway, taking the keys out of the ignitions, locking the doors. It's said that in Georgia last year a blockade of the faithful ran interference for him through a web of parked police cars outside Waycross and allowed him to pass unmolested, such is the strength of his fame. Flenco hasn't a placard. She has rented a billboard beside the cafe, letters six feet tall proclaiming HEALER HEAL MY HUSBAND. Telephone reports from her sister-in-law in Bruce confirm the rumor that he has left Water Valley and is heading their way. Flenco imagines him coming down out of the hilly country, barreling down the secondary roads and blasting toward the very spot where she sits fanning Mr. Redding's feverish frame.

"Oh shit," Mr. Redding says. "Oh God . . . dang!"

"Just rest easy now, honey," Flenco says. "You want me to go get you some Co-Coler?"

"Hell naw, I don't want no goddamn Co-Coler," Mr. Redding says. "I want some . . . want some goddamn . . . I want some . . . shit! Just carry me . . . back home and . . . goddamn . . . let me die. I'm . . . goddamn . . . burning up out here."

Flenco hugs his skinny body tight and feels one of his

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emaciated wrists. Hands that used to hold a silver microphone hang limply from his cadaverous arms, all speckled with liver spots. She wants him to hold on a little longer because she doesn't know if the healer has worked his way up to raising the dead yet. She knows a little of his scanty history. Born to Christian Seminoles and submerged for thirty-seven minutes in the frigid waters of Lake Huron at the age of fourteen, he was found by divers and revived with little hope of ultimate survival by fire fighters on a snow-covered bank. He allegedly lay at death's door in a coma for nine weeks, then suddenly got out of his bed, ripping the IV tubes out, muttering without cursing, and walked down the hall to the intensive care unit where a family of four held a death vigil over their ninety-year-old grandmother fatally afflicted with a ruptured duodenum and laid his hands on her. The legend goes that within two minutes the old lady was sitting up in the bed demanding fudge ripple on a sugar cone and a pack of Lucky Strikes. Fame soon followed and the boy's yard became littered with the sick and the crippled, and the knees of his jeans became permanently grass-stained from kneeling. The walking canes piled up in a corner of the yard as a testament to his powers. A man brought a truck once a week to collect the empty wheelchairs. He made the blind see, the mute speak. A worldwide team of doctors watched him cure a case of wet leprosy. The president had him summoned to the White House, but he could not go; the street in front of his house was blocked solid with the bodies of the needing-to-be-healed. People clamored after him, and women for his seed. The supermarket tabloids proclaim that he will not break the vow he gave to God in the last few frantic moments before sinking below the waters of Lake Huron: if God would bring him back from a watery death he would remain pure and virginal in order to do His work. And now he has come South like a hunted animal to seek out the legions of believers with their sad and twisted limbs.

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"Flenc," Mr. Redding coughs out, "How many goddamn times I told you . . . oh shit . . . not to . . . aw hell, ahhhhh."

The tent is down, the rain has ceased. The footsteps of many are printed in the mud. He's had to sign autographs this time, and fighting the women off is never easy. They are convinced the child they'd bear would be an Albert Einstein, an Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Tom Selleck with the brain of Renoir. Some tell him they only want him for a few moments to look at something in the back seat of their car, but he knows they are offering their legs and their breasts and their mouths. He can't resist them any more. He's thinking about getting out of the business. The promise has already been broken anyway, and the first time was the hardest.

His bodyguards and henchmen push with arms spread against the surging crowd and his feet suck in the mud as he picks his way to his Caddy. All around sit cars and pickup trucks parked or stuck spinning in the mud as the weak sun tries to smile down between the parting clouds.

He gets into the car and inserts the ignition key and the engine barks instantly into life with the merest flick of the key. The engine is as finely tuned as a Swiss watchmaker's watch and it hums with a low and throaty purring that emanates from glass-pack mufflers topped off with six feet of chrome. He tromps on the gas pedal and the motor rumbles, cammed up so high it will barely take off.

He hits the gas harder and the Caddy squats in the mud, fishtailing like an injured snake through the quagmire of goop. The crowd rushes the bodyguards, pushing their burly bodies back and down and trampling them underfoot, stepping on their fingers, surging forward to lay their once withered hands on the dusty flanks of the healer's automobile. Faces gather around the windows outside and the healer steers his machine through the swampy mess of the pasture and over to a faint trail of gravel that leads to the highway. Many hands push and

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when he guns the big car mud balls thwack hollowly and flatten on the pants and shirts of the faithful left gawking after him in his wake. They wave, beat their chests to see him go. Liberated children turn handsprings in the mud and perform impromptu fencing matches with their useless crutches and these images recede quickly through the back window as the car lurches toward the road.

The healer looks both ways before pulling out on the highway. Cars are lined on both sides all the way to the curves that lie in the distance. Horns blare behind him and he turns the car north and smashes the gas pedal flat against the floorboard. The big vehicle takes the road under its wheels and rockets past the lines of automobiles. Small hands wave from the back seats as he accelerates rapidly past them.

The needle on the speedometer rises quickly. He eyes the gas guage's red wedge of metal edged toward FULL. He finds K.D. Lang on the radio and fishes beneath the seat for the flask of vodka his bodyguards have secreted there. The prearranged destination is Marion, Arkansas, where droves of the helpless are rumored to be gathered in a field outside the town.

He takes one hit, two hits, three hits of vodka and pops the top on a hot Coke while reaching for his smokes. His shoes are slathered with mud and his shirt is dirty, but fresh clothes await him somewhere up ahead. Everything is provided. Every bathroom in the South is open to him. The Fuzzbuster on the dash ticks and he hits the brakes just in time to cruise by a cruiser hidden in a nest of honeysuckle. At fifty-seven mph.

He feels weak and ashamed for breaking his vow, but the women won't let him alone. They seem to know the weakness of his flesh. A new issue of *Penthouse* is under the seat. He reaches over and takes his eyes off the road for a moment, pulls the magazine out. He flips it open and the pictures are there, with nothing left to the imagination, the long legs, the tawny hair, the full and pouting lips. With a sharp stab of guilt he closes it up and shoves

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it back under the seat. He can't go on like this. A decision has to be made. There are too many who believe in him and he is the vessel of their faith. He knows he's unworthy of that trust now. It's going to be embarrassing if God decides to let him down one night in front of a hundred and fifty people. The crowd might even turn ugly and lynch him if he's suddenly unable to heal. They've come to expect it. They have every right to expect it. But they don't know about his needs. They don't know what it's like to be denied the one thing that everybody else can have: the intimate touch of another.

He lights the cigarette and cracks the vent as a smattering of raindrops splatters across the windshield. He turns the wipers on and passes through a curtain of rain as perpendicular as a wall, crosses over onto a shiny darkened highway with tiny white explosions of water pinging up on its surface. He tromps on the gas pedal and the Caddy's tires sing their high-speeded whine. Small heads on front porches turn like tennis spectators as a black flash shoots down the road. He waves.

Mr. Redding lies near comatose under the shade tree Flenco has dragged him to, and people coming out of the cafe now are giving him queasy looks. Flenco knows that some good citizen might have an ambulance called.

"Just hold on now, baby," Flenco says. "I feel it in my heart he's coming any minute now."

"I don't give a . . . give a good . . . a good . . . a good goddamn . . . I don't give a shit who's coming," Mr. Redding hacks out. His lips are slimy with a splotching of pink foam and his breath rattles in his chest like dry peas in a pod. He quivers and shakes and licks his lips and groans. Flenco cradles his graying head in her ample lap and rubs the top of his hat with her tremendous sagging breasts. Her rose-tipped nipples miss the passion that used to be in Mr. Redding's tongue. Flenco deeply feels this loss of sexual desire and sighs in her sleep at night on the couch while Mr. Redding hacks and coughs and

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curses in the bedroom and gets up to read detective magazines or rolls all over the bed. She's ashamed of her blatant overtures and attempts at enticement, the parted robe, the naked toweling off beside the open bathroom door, the changing of her underwear in the middle of the day. Mr. Redding appears not to notice, only lights one Pall Mall after another and swears.

She has sent a wide-eyed little boy inside for another chocolate milk shake and he brings it out to her under the tree where she holds the gasping wheezebag who used to belt out one Elvis song after another in his white jumpsuit with the silver zippers. He'd been nabbed for bad checks in Texas, was on the run from a Mann Act in Alabama, but Flenco fell in love with his roguey smile and twinkling eyes the first time she saw him do "You Ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog" at the junior/senior prom. His battered travel trailer had a cubbyhole with a stained mattress that held the scented remnants of other nights of lust. But Flenco, pressed hard against the striped ticking with her head in a corner, found in his wild and enthusiastic gymnastics a kind of secret delight. Shunned by her schoolmates, sent to the office for passing explicit notes to boys, downtrodden by the depression caused by her steady eating, Flenco was hopelessly smitten in the first few minutes with his hunk of "Burning Love."

Now her lover lies wasted in her lap, his true age finally showing, his wrinkled neck corded with skin like an old lizard's as he sags against her and drools. She's not asking for immortality; she's not asking for the Fountain of Youth; she's only asking for a little more time. The hope that burns in her heart is a candle lit to the memory of physical love. She wipes his hot face tenderly with a wadded napkin soaked in the cold sweat from the milk-shake cup. Mr. Redding turns and digs his head deeper into her belly. People at the tables in the cafe are staring openly through the windows now and Flenco knows it's only a matter of time before somebody calls the lawdogs.

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"Can I do anything for you, baby?" she says.

Mr. Redding turns his eyes up to her and the pain buried in them is like a dying fire.

"Hell yeah you can . . . do . . . something . . . goddamn . . . do something . . . oh shit . . . for me. You can . . . goddamn . . . oh shit . . . you can . . . just . . . hell . . . by God . . . shoot me."

"Oh baby, don't talk like that," Flenco says. Her eyes mist up and she covers his face with her breasts until he reaches up with both hands and tries to push the weighty mass of her mammary monsters up out of the way.

"Goddamn, what you . . . what you trying to . . . trying to . . . I didn't say . . . smother me," Mr. Redding says.

Flenco doesn't answer. She closes her eyes and feels the former flicks of his tongue across her breastworks in a memory as real as their truck.

The road is straight, the cotton young and strong, and the Caddy is a speeding bullet across the flat highway. The needle is buried to the hilt at 120 and the car is floating at the very limit of adhesion, weightless, almost, drifting slightly side to side like a ship lightly tacking on the ocean in the stiff edges of a breeze. The blue pulses of light winking far behind him in the sun are like annoying toys, no more. The healer dips handful after handful of roofing tacks out of the sack beside him and flings them out the open window, scattering them like bad seeds. The blue lights fade, are gone, left far behind. Others of like bent are waiting probably somewhere ahead but he'll deal with them when the time comes.

Fruit and vegetable stands flash by the open windows of the car, junk peddlers, mobile homes, stacked firewood corded up on the sides of the road for sale, waving people, fans. It is these people he heals, these people crushed and maimed by the falling trees, by the falling house trailers, by the falling cars and junk. These innocents carving a life out of the wilderness with their hands, these with so much faith that he is merely an instrument,

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a transmitter to funnel the energy required to make them stand up and throw away their braces. He thinks of the promise he made going down reaching for the surface of Lake Huron. He gets another drink of the vodka and lights another cigarette and shakes his head as the hubcaps glitter in the sun.

"Lord God I wouldn't have touched her if I was the Pope!" he suddenly screams out into the car, beating his fist on the seat. He turns his head and shouts out the open window: "Why didn't you let me die and then bring me back as the Pope? Huh? You want to answer that one, Lord?"

He takes another quick suck of the hot vodka. His shoulders shiver, and he caps it.

"I cain't cure everbody in the whole world!"

He slows down and rolls to about fifteen mph and shouts to a God maybe lurking behind a dilapidated cotton pen and guarded by a pink Edsel with the hood on the roof.

"You ought not made it so tough on me! I ain't like Jesus, I'm human! I can't do it no more, they's too many of 'em! They's too many women! I take back my promise, I quit!"

The long low surprised face of a farmer in a 1953 Chevrolet pickup with a goat in the back passes by him in slow motion, his head hanging out the window, a woman looking over his shoulder, seeing, figuring the black car and the haranguing finger poking out at a telephone pole, gathering her wits, her thoughts, her breath, to point back, inhale, scream: "It's HIM! PRAISE WONDERFUL GOD IT'S HIIIIIIM!"

The healer looks. He sees the old black pickup grind to a halt, the one brake light coming on, the woman hopping out the door, arms waving, the farmer leaning out the window waving. For the first time ever the healer is tempted to burn rubber and leave them smelling his getaway fumes, leave behind him unheard the story of their huge drooling son, prisoner of the basement,

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chained in the garage at the family reunions. But the faces of these two parents are lit like rays of sunshine with the knowledge that a modern messiah has chosen the road that borders their alfalfa patch to receive His divine instructions.

The woman runs up to the side of the car and lays her hands on the fender as if she'd hold it to keep the car from leaving. Her beady eyes and panting breath and hopeless, eternal, hope-filled face tell the healer this woman has a task of such insurmountable proportions she's scarce shared the secret of her problem with minister or preacher or parson, that this one's so bad he can't quit now. Holy cow. What pining cripple on his bed of mouldy quilts with his palsied arms shaking lies waiting nearly forever for his release? What afflicted lamb has lain behind a curtain to be hidden from company all these years? Here, he sees, are the mother and the father, the suffering parents, here with their pain and their hope and their alfalfa patch and cows and fish ponds, their world struck askew by the birth or the affliction or the accident that befell their fallen one, with neither hope of redemption or cure available for what might be eating mothballs or masturbating in old dirty underwear and hiding it under his mother's mattress to be discovered when the springs need turning, might be roaming the pastures by night creeping stealthily upon the female livestock.

"Healer," the woman asks. "Will you heal my child?"

He's not coming, Flenco suddenly decides. In a burst of thought process too deep for her to understand, a mere scab on the broad scar of telepathy which man's mind forgot to remember eons ago, she knows somehow that another emergency has detained him. She knows, too, that they must therefore go find him. She gets up and catches Mr. Redding under the armpits and drags him through the dust toward the truck, where now in large numbers on the other side of the cafe windows people stand gathered to track the proceedings and place

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wagers on the estimated time of arrival of Mr. Redding's demise.

"Oh hope, there's hope," she chants and pants. His heels make two trails of dust through the parking lot but his loafers stay on like a miracle or a magic trick. Flenco gets him next to the running board and stoops to release the precious burden of him, opens the door, gives a hefty grunt and hauls him up into the seat. Mr. Redding falls over against the horn of the truck and it begins to blow as Flenco shuts the door and runs around to the other side. She yanks open the door and pushes him erect in the seat and reaches across him and locks the door so he won't fall out and hurt himself any worse. Those cigarettes have a hold on him that keeps him from eating, from gaining weight, from not wheezing in the early morning hours when she awakens beside him and lies in the dark staring at his face and twirling the tufts of gray hair on his chest around her fingers. But maybe the healer can even cure him of his addiction, drive the blackness from his lungs, the platelets from his aorta, flush the tiny capillaries in their encrusted fingers of flesh. She belts him in.

Mr. Redding sits in a perfect and abject state of apathy, his head keened back on his neck and his closed eyes seeing nothing. Not even coughing.

"Hold on, baby," Flenco says, and cranks the truck. Truckers and patrons stand gawking at the rooster tail of dust and gravel kicked up by the spinning wheel of the truck, then it slews badly, hits the road sliding and is gone in a final suck of sound.

With stabbing motions of her arm and hand, index finger extended, the mother directs the healer into the yard. A white picket fence with blooming daffodils belies the nature of the thing inside.

"Please, he's a baby, harmless really, come, in here, behind, I just know you, please, my mother she, my brother too they," she gasps.

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The healer turns in and sees the black pickup coming behind him, the goat peeking around the cab as if directing its movement, this Nubian. Before he can fully stop the car, the woman is tugging on his arm, saying, "In here, you, oh, my husband, like a child, really."

He opens the door and starts out as the truck slides to a stop beside him, dust rising to drift over them. The healer waves his hand and coughs and the woman pulls on his arm. The farmer jogs around the hood on his gimpy leg and they each take an arm and lead him up the steps, across the porch, both of them talking in either ear a mix of latent complaints, untold griefs and shared blames for the years this child born wrong and then injured in the brain has visited on this house. The healer is dragged into a living room with white doilies under lamps and a flowerful rug spread over polished wood and a potbellied stove in one corner where a dead squirrel sits eating a varnished walnut.

"Back here, in here, he," the woman rants.

"You know, he, by golly, our field," the farmer raves.

The healer is afraid they're going to smell his breath and he turns his face from side to side as he's dragged with feet sliding to the back room, inside the closet, down hidden stairs revealed by a trapdoor. The farmer unlocks a door in the dark, hits a switch. A light comes on. Gray walls of drabness lie sweating faintly deep in the earth's damp and they're hung with old mattresses brown with spots. The furniture in the room is soft with rot, green with mold. A large, naked, drooling hairy man sits playing with a ball of his own shit in the center of the room, his splayed feet and fuzzy toes black with dirt and his sloped forehead furrowed in concentration. He says, "Huuuuuuuurrrrrnnn . . ."

The healer recoils. The hairy man sits happily in the center of the floor amongst plates of old food and the little pies he has made, but looks up and eyes his parents and the paling youth between them and instantly his

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piglike eyes darken with total ignorance or, like the darkest of animals, an unveiled hostile threat.

"Hurrrrr," he says, and swivels on his buttocks to face them.

"Sweet Lord Jesus Christ," the healer whispers. "Get me out of here."

"Not so fast, young fella," the farmer says, and unlimbers from a back pocket a hogleg of Dirty Harry proportions, backs to the door behind him, locks it, pockets the key deep in his overalls.

It doesn't smell nice at all in this dungeon and the thing before him begins to try to get up on its knees and make sounds of wet rumbling wanting deep in its throat. The eyebrows knit up and down and together and apart and the healer draws back with his hands up because the man is sniffing now, trying like a blind calf to scent his mother, maybe remembering milk.

Mr. Redding lies back in the seat not even harrumphing but merely jackknifed into the position his wife has seated him in like a form set in concrete while the truck roars down the road. Flenco slurps the sediment of her shake through the straw and flings the used container out the window into a passing mass of sunflowers' bright yellow faces. Her right hand is clenched upon the wheel and her foot is pressed hard on the gas.

"Hold on, baby," she says. "I don't know where he's at but we're going to find him." Her mouth is grim.

Mr. Redding doesn't answer. He sits mute and unmoving with his head canted back and lolling limply on his neck, the squashed knot of his reversible fishing hat pulled down over his ears. He seems uninterested in the green countryside flashing by, the happy farms of cows grazing contentedly on the lush pasture grass, the wooded creeks and planted fields within the industry of American agriculture thriving peacefully beside the road.

Flenco reaches over and gets one of his cigarettes from

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his pocket and grabs a box of matches off the dash. She doesn't usually smoke but the situation is making her nervous. Afraid that his rancid lips might never again maul her fallow flesh, she scratches the match on the box and touches the whipping flame to the tip of the Pall Mall 100. Deluged with the desperation of despair, she draws the smoke deep and then worries her forehead with the cigarette held between her fingers. Her eyes scan the fertile fields and unpainted barns for a gathering of cripples miraculously assembled somewhere to seek out the ultimate truth. Somewhere between the borders of three counties a black Caddy runs speeding to another destination and she must intercept it or find its location. The rotting fruit of her romance lies hanging in the balance. The sad wreck of her lover must be rejuvenated. All is lost if not.

Flenco remembers the early years with Mr. Redding. Through him the ghost of Elvis not only lived but sang and whirled his pumping hips to dirges engraved on the brains of fans like grooves in records. He could get down on one knee and bring five or six of them screaming to their feet and rushing to the edge of the stage, the nostalgic, the overweight, the faded dyed ever faithful. Now this sad wasted figure lays his head back on the seat with his lips slightly parted, his tongue drying.

Flenco smokes the cigarette furiously, stabs the scenery with her eyes, roars down the left fork of a road where a sign says HILLTOP 10 MILES. Dust hurtles up behind the pickup as it barrels down the hill. Flenco has the blind faith of love but she panics when she thinks that she might not find the healer, that he might be out of reach already, that he might have taken an alternate road and be somewhere else in the county, doing his work, healing the minions who seek him out, laying his hands on other unfortunates whose despair has eclipsed hers. But as long as there is gas in the truck, as long as Mr. Redding draws breath, she will drive until the wheels fall off the truck, until the cows come home, until they piss

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on the fire and call the dogs. Until hope, however much is left, is smashed, kicked around, stomped on or gone. Until Mr. Redding is dead.

Flenco eyes him and feels uneasy over his stillness. She's never known him to be this quiet before. She mashes harder on the gas and her beloved sways in the curves.

"Hold on, baby," she whispers.

The healer stands unmoving with the hard round mouth of the pistol in his back. The man on the floor is growling low and grinding his tartared teeth. His hairy arms are encrusted with a nasty crap.

"Aaaarrrrr," he says.

"Yes, darling," the mother coos. "The nice man has come to help us. You like the nice man, don't you, dear?"

"He likes to play," the farmer says. "He plays down here all the time, don't you, son?" the farmer says. "We just keep him down here so he won't scare people," he explains.

The parents see no need to recite the list of stray dogs and hapless cats caught and torn limb from limb, dripping joints of furred meat thrust mouthward without mayonnaise. The six-year-old girl still missing from last year is best not spoken of. The farmer now makes use of a pneumatic tranquilizer gun before laying on the chains and padlocks at night. Delivered at home beside his stillborn twin like Elvis, the hairy one has a headstone over his undug grave.

The warped and wavy line of his dented skull is thick with a rancid growth where small insect life traverses the stalks of his matted hair. He sways and utters his guttural verbs and fixes the healer's face with his bated malevolence and grunts his soft equations into the dusty air.

"He wants to play," the mother says. "Ain't that cute."

"Cute as a bug," the farmer says, without loosening his grip on the pistol.

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"I can't heal him," the healer says.

"What did you say?" the farmer says.

"Did he say what I think he said?" the mother says.

"I think you better say that again," the farmer says.

"I can't heal him. I can't heal anything like this."

"What are you saying?" the mother says.

"You heard what he said," the farmer says. "Says he can't heal him."

"Can't?" the mother says.

"I can't," the healer says, as the man on the floor drools a rope of drool and moans a secret rhyme and moves his shoulders to and fro and never takes his eyes off the healer's face.

"I bet you'd like to know what happened to him," the mother says.

"Horse kicked him," the farmer says.

"Right in the head," the mother says.

"Turned him ass over teakettle," the farmer says. "Kicked him clean over a fence."

"Like to kicked half his head off," the mother says. "But you've cured worse than this. That little girl over in Alabama last year with that arm growed out of her stomach and that old man in the Delta who had two and a half eyes. You can heal him. Now heal him."

"We done read all about you," the farmer says. "We been trying to find you for months."

"And then he just come driving right by the place," the mother says. "Will wonders never cease."

The man on the floor is trying to form the rude impulses necessary to gather his legs beneath himself and put his feet flat on the floor. He wants to stand and will stand in a moment and the farmer reaches quickly behind him for the coiled whip on a nail.

"Easy now, son," he says.

A low uneasy moaning begins at sight of the bullwhip and the bared teeth alternate with that in a singsong incantation as he totters up onto his knees and rests his folded knuckles flat on the floor. The hair is long on his

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back and arms and legs. His face is transfixed with an ignorance as old as time, yet a small light burns in his eyes, and he has a little tail six inches in length extending from the coccyx bone with a tufted tip of bristles. He slides forward a few inches closer to the healer. Old bones lie piled in corners for safekeeping with their scraps of blackened flesh.

"You might as well go on and heal him," the farmer says. "We ain't letting you out of here till you do."

"He's been like this a long time," the mother says.

"You don't understand," the healer says. "I've never dealt with anything like this."

"You cured cancer," the farmer says.

"Raised the dead, I've heard," the mother says.

"No ma'am. Ain't nobody ever raised the dead but Jesus Himself," the healer says, as the thing begins to look as if it would like to grab his leg. He tries to retreat, but the gun is in his back like a hard finger.

"What you think, mama?" the farmer says.

"I think he's trying to pull our leg," she says.

"You think he's a false prophet?"

"Might be. Or maybe he's used up all his power?"

"What about it, young feller? You used up all your power?"

"I known it was him when I seen that black car," she says.

"Lots of people have black cars," the healer says dully, unable to take his own eyes off those dully glinting ones before him. What lies inside there will not do to look at, it won't be altered by human hands, probably should have been drowned when it was little. "Don't let him hurt me," he says.

"Hurt you? Why he ain't going to hurt you," the mother says. "He just wants to play with you a little bit. We come down here and play with him all the time, don't we, daddy."

"That's right," the farmer says. "Hopfrog and leap-

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scotch and like that. Go on and lay your hands on him. He won't bite or nothing, I promise."

"He's real good most of the time," she says. "We just keep him penned up so he won't hurt hisself."

"I can't . . . I can't . . ." the healer begins.

"Can't what?" the farmer says.

"Can't what?" the mother says.

"*Touch* him," the healer breathes.

"Uh oh," says the farmer. "I's afraid of that, mama."

"You people have got to let me out of here," the healer says. "I'm on my way to Arkansas."

"Wrong answer, mister," the farmer says.

"Definitely the wrong answer," the mother says.

Their boy moves closer and his snarling mouth seems to smile.

Flenco stands in her nightgown and robe and curlers, pumping gas into the neck of the fuel tank located in the left rear quarter panel of the truck. Years ago Mr. Redding took a hammer and screwdriver to it so that it would readily accept a leaded gasoline nozzle. Flenco pumps five dollars worth into it and hands the money to the attendant who wiped no windshield and checked no oil but stood gawking at the rigid figure of Mr. Redding displayed in the seat like a large sack of potatoes. The attendant takes the five and looks thoughtfully at Flenco, then opens his mouth to ask:

"Lady, is this guy all right?"

Flenco starts to go around and get behind the wheel and then, when she sees the beer signs hung in the windows of the gas station, thinks of the twenty dollar bill wadded in the pocket of her robe like used facial tissue.

"Well he's been sick," she says, hurrying toward the door of the building.

"I don't believe he's feeling real good right now," he says to her disappearing back. When she goes inside, he watches her heading for the beer coolers at the back of

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the store and steps closer to the open window of the truck. He studies Mr. Redding from a vantage point of ten inches and notices that his lips are blue and his face is devoid of any color, sort of like, a *lot* like, an uncle of his who was laid out in a coffin in the comfort of his own home some two weeks before.

"Mister," he says. "Hey, mister!"

Mr. Redding has nothing to say. Flenco comes rushing back out the door with three quart bottles of cold Busch in a big grocery sack and a small package of cups for whenever Mr. Redding feels like waking up and partaking of a cool refreshing drink. She eyes the attendant suspiciously and gets in the truck and sets the beer on the seat between them, pausing first to open one bottle and set it between her massive thighs. She leans up and cranks the truck and looks at the attendant who steps back and holds up one hand and says, "Don't mind me, lady, it's a free country." Then she pulls it down into D and roars out onto the road.

Flenco gooses it up to about sixty and reaches over briefly to touch Mr. Redding's hand. The hand is cool and limp and she's glad the fever has passed. He'll feel better now that he's had a nap, maybe, not be so irritable. Maybe she can talk to him reasonably. His temper's never been good even when he was sober which hasn't been much these last twenty years. Flenco wonders where all those years went to and then realizes that one day just built onto another one like with a mason stacking bricks. All those nights in all those beer joints with all that singing and stomping and screaming and women shouting out declarations of desire for the frenzied figure that was him just past his prime blend together in her mind and spin like carousel horses in a fun-house ride. They billed him as Uncle Elvis, and he's told Flenco a little about his one trip up the river and how they'd hit you in the head with something if you didn't act right, but those days are long gone and what does it matter now since the cars he stole were transient things and even now

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probably lie stripped and rusted out in some junkyard bog, a hulking garden of flowers adorning their machine-gunned sides?

Flenco feels guilty for feeling her faith sag a little when she thinks of all the miles of roads the healer could be on and how easy it will be to miss him. She wonders if it was smart to abandon her big billboard sign by the side of the road and take off like this, but she was feeling the grip of a helpless sudden hopeless inertia and there was nothing to do but put some road under her wheels.

Flenco glances at Mr. Redding who is still oblivious to everything with the wind sailing up his nostrils. She takes a hefty slug of the beer between her legs. She nudges him.

"You want some of this beer, baby? You still asleep? Well you just go on and take you a nap, get rested. Maybe you'll feel better when you wake up."

Flenco hopes that's so. She hopes for a clue, a sign somehow, maybe that gathering of the crippled in a field like she's heard happens sometimes. If she can find him, she'll deliver Mr. Redding into the healer's healing hands herself. But if she can't, she doesn't know what she's going to do. She feels like the eleventh hour is fast approaching, and her beloved sits on the seat beside her in stony silence, his mouth open, his head canted back, the wind gently riffling his thin gray hair now that his reversible cap has blown off.

"I think maybe they need a little time to get to know one another, mama, what do you think?" the farmer says.

"That might be a good idear," the mother says. "Leave 'em alone together a while and maybe they can play."

The healer looks for a place to run but there are no windows in the airless chamber of what his good work has brought him to and no door but the one the farmer guards with the point of a gun.

"You can't leave me down here with him," the healer says, and he searches for some shred of sanity in the

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seamed faces of the farmer and his wife. His playmate edges closer.

"You could even eat supper with us if you wanted to after you heal him," the mother says. "Be right nice if we could all set down at the table together."

"He makes too big a mess for him to eat with us very much," the farmer says, a little apologetically, gesturing with the gun. "Thows his food everwhere and what not."

The farmer turns with the key in his pocket and fumbles down deep in there for it. He takes the key out and has to almost turn his back on the healer to get it in the lock, but he says, "I wouldn't try nothing funny if I was you."

"If you're scared of him biting you we'll hold him and not let him bite you," the mother says.

The key clicks in the lock and the farmer says, "I just don't believe he's much of a mind to heal him, mama. We can go up here and take us a nap and when we come back down they liable to be discussing philosophy or something, you cain't never tell."

"You people don't understand," the healer says. "He's beyond help. There's nothing I can do for him. I don't deal with the mind. I deal with the body."

"Ain't nothing wrong with his body," the mother says. "We just had to slow him down a little."

"His body's in good shape," the farmer says. "He's strong as a ox. Why I've seen him pull cows out of mud holes before. I don't believe he knows how strong he is."

"We'll be back after a while," the mother says, and out the door she goes. "Come on, daddy," she says back. The farmer backs out the door holding the gun on the healer and then the door closes. There are sounds of the other lock being affixed on the other side. The healer backs hard into the corner and eyes the mumbling being in front of him.

"Jesus would heal him if He was here!" the farmer hollers through the thick door. "I done read all about what He done in the Bible! What They've done, They've

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done laid this burden on us to test our faith! Ain't that right, mama!"

"That's right, daddy!" the mother shouts through the door.

"We been tested!" the farmer screams. "We been tested hard and we ain't been found wanting! Have we, mama!"

"You got that right, daddy! Lot of folks couldn't put up with what we've put up with!"

"Just don't make him mad!" the farmer shrieks. "Don't try to take nothing away from him if he's playing with it! He don't like that! He's a little spoiled!"

"He likes to rassle but don't get in a rasslin' match with him 'cause he gets mad sometimes! Don't get him mad! We'll be back in about a hour! Talk to him! He likes that!"

A rapid clump of footsteps climbing up the stairs fades away to a slammed door above. The healer flattens himself in the corner with his arms bracing up the walls.

"Don't touch me, please," he says, then adds: "I'm not going to hurt you."

The prisoner has made himself a bed of soiled quilts and assorted bedding and he pillows his head with a discarded tire. His nest is knotted with hairs and his lair is infested with lice. The farmer has snipped his hamstrings and Achilles tendon on alternate legs and cauterized the severed sinews while the mother kept the head restrained and the howling muffled with towels rolled and stuffed over his mouth one midnight scene years ago. He moves toward the healer slowly, hard. The healer watches the painful stance, the shifting feet, the arms outspread for balance, and he walks like a man on a tightrope as he makes his way across. Perhaps to kiss? His dangling thangling is large and hairy, swaying there like a big brown anesthetized mole.

The healer watches him come. On the edges of the wasted fields of the South and stuck back in the roadless reaches of timber where people have trails like animals,

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the unseen faceless sum of mankind's lesser genes quietly disassemble cars and squat underneath trees talking, and back of them lie small dwellings of rotted wood and sagging floors where strange children sit wrapped for hours on end slavering mutely and uttering no words from their stunned mouths. Pictures of porches full of them all shy and embarrassed or smiling in delight turn up now and again here and there, but no visitor but the documenter of the far less fortunate comes to visit again. It is not that they are not God's children, but that mankind shuns them, bad reminders of rotted teeth and mismatched eyes, uncontrollable sexual desire turned loose in the woods to procreate a new race of the drooling mindless eating where they shit. He is like them, but even they would not accept him. An old midwife who knew anything would not allow the question. In the first few desperate moments the hand would smother the mouth, pinch the nostrils, still the heaving chest trying to draw in the first tiny breath. The brother and sister above know this. They have known it for years.

The thing comes closer and the healer looks into its depthless eyes, eyes like a fish that lives so deep in the dark black of the ocean and has no need to see. He thinks of the woman's legs in the back seat of the car parked behind a Walgreen's in Sumter and the strength of the promise to God. He thinks not of retribution or outrage, and not even fear anymore. He thinks of mercy, and lambs, and he brings his hands out from his sides to suffer to him this outcast. His fingers reach and they touch and he clamps them down hard over the ears. Dust motes turn in the air. They stand in stillness, hardly breathing, locked by the touch of another hand. Their eyes close. The healer fills his chest with air. He prepares to command him to heal.

Flenco sits sobbing beside the road in a grove of trees with a cool breeze wafting through, gently moving the hair on Mr. Redding's head. It's a nice afternoon for a

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nap, but Flenco has no thoughts of sleep. The search is over and he is cold like a slice of bologna, an egg from the refrigerator. The state troopers cluster behind her and slap their ticket books along their legs, heads shaking in utter solemnity or undisguised amazement. The ambulance crew waits, their equipment useless, their ambu bags and cardiopulmonary cases still scattered over the gravelly grass. The sun is going down and the legendary speeder has not appeared, and the roadblock will soon be broken up, the blue and white cruisers sent out to other destinations like prowling animals simply to prowl the roads.

But an interesting phenomenon has briefly materialized to break the boredom of an otherwise routine afternoon, a fat woman drunk and hauling the dead corpse of her husband down the road at ninety, sobbing and screaming and yelling out loud to God, and they wait now only for the coroner to place his seal of approval so that the body can be moved. One trooper leans against a tree chewing a stem of grass and remarks to nobody in particular: "I been to three county fairs, two goat-ropin's and one horse-fuckin', and I ain't never seen nothing like that."

Some chuckle, others shake their heads, as if to allow that the world is a strange place and in it lie things of another nature, a bent order, and beyond a certain point there are no rules to make man mind.

A wrecker is moving slowly with its red light down the road. Doves cry in the trees. And down the road in a field stand three giant wooden crosses, their colors rising in the falling sunlight, yellow, and blue, and tan.

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Two Poems by John Updike

Light Switches

God, but one wearies of flipping them,
of turning them, or punching or,
with certain rheostatted switches, sliding them.
Nipples on the walls' flat chests,
they yield the milk of light—the creamy
incandescence of resistant tungsten,
and lo-fat fluorescence that comes
in brimming, humming tubes. A modern
miracle, okay; but miracles wear
over a man's or woman's lifetime
into mere routines, into minor details
that acquire no-meaning's muffled sense
of a gap between purpose and sign
like the gap inside a careful package
stuffed with newspapers wadded into nonsense,
the language they were printed in no matter.
Off. On. It goes without saying.
And the sockets get boring, too—their twin mouths
and little flat-sided eye for the grounding prong.
The walls are threaded with magic, so what?
It's magic merely our own, cooked up
so we can watch inane commercials—
never a lightning arising from a sky
beyond our brains, where electric-blue Zeus
hurls laughing bolts that weld amino acids
to a fantastic random hunger.
Instead, these mechanisms we understand,
these diagrams whose starkness shocks the soul.
Off, on—there must be something else,
some middle way, third eye, or *shakti* current.
Uptilted like blond clitorises
of plastic, their pure thrill palls
with the morning shave and the midnight douche.

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Fly

What have we done this winter to deserve
this plague of giant flies? They breed in the house,
being born to batter and buzz at the glass
of windows where sunshine shows a world of snow.

Stupid out of season, they are easy to swat,
and some can't seem to fly, but run across
the kitchen linoleum in a comical hurry,
more like a frantic man than you would think.

Stupid myself one noon, I watched one primp
head-down on a sunstruck kitchen wall.
He rubbed his face on his rotating head
with forelegs finer than a pencil line;

a cleansing seemed in progress, bit by bit.
He held each wing out stiff, its rainbow shadow
projected down the wall diagonally,
and scrubbed the membranes with a fussy leg.

All creatures groom, but who would figure that
a fly, which thrives on dirt, could be so nice?
His head and legs were like a watchwork's ticking,
but spaced by intervals of what seemed thought.

His interlocking parts' complexity
was photocopied by his lengthened shadow,
a sharp mechanical drawing sunshine drew:
—each twitch, each quick caress of mouth-parts,

each hinge of animate anatomy.
Up from a maggot had arisen this tower
of microcosmic beams, their third dimension
craned outward to contain a fourth, called life.

So how can I crush construction so rare?
A bomber flattens cities but cannot see
the child in the map, the network of girders.
Swat not, not I at the moment, all eye.

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Jane Hirshfield

The Wedding

Nothing is lost, nothing created:
everything is transformed.

—Antoine Laurent Lavoisier
Elements of Chemistry, *1789*

The windows stream with fish,
the gold luck of carp,
the tiny silver luck of minnows,
while the earth gives back her wealth
of skunks and star-crossed badgers:
pure stripes of seeing unfurl themselves
out of moonlight, and the dark bodies
follow as closely as boat follows sail
and know no harm will come to them in their
wholeness.
All beings rise, uncaught, for this beginning.
Cousin Death joins a table at the wedding,
the white cloth gleams, the waiting plates,
all are made welcome.
Mother War smooths the silk of her dress,
she feels young and will dance again, after years,
with her husband, Pity.
Still the guests are arriving, carrying gifts—
small appliances, vases, a thick set of towels,
lamps of heaviest brass.
They say each other's names, Charity, Hope, and ask
of nieces and nephews off to school.
A rabbit edges near, outside the glass.
On the river a barge floats softly, its tugs at slack;

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night herons and pelicans preen, an iron bell flames
with the slow ringing fire of rust and the barge
imperceptibly
lowers. Imagine nothing created, what it might look
like,
try to envision such peace.
Now see the dark-shelled flowers of thought unmade,
the petals of Little Boy unassembled,
the plague-poxed donkeys unflung over city walls, the
dead
undead, the survivors unlonely. Or think of a world
in which nothing is lost, its heaped paintings,
the studded statues keeping their jewels.
Now see this very world, where all is transformed,
quick as a child who cries and then laughs in her
crying—
now ingot, now blossoming ash,
now table, now suckling lamb on that table.
How each thing meets the other as itself, the
luminous changing
mirror of itself—mercuric oxide tipped from flask to
flask,
first two, then one, wedded for life in that vow.

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Two Poems by James Lasdun

Baroque

Borromini
(1599–1667)

Spirit and form; to every soul its shell;
Sounds their instruments—flute, double bass,
Trumpet, each instrument its plush-lined case,
The flesh its cribs, Death its Heaven and Hell.
Bernini, your lightest-fingered rival,
Built only on the human scale, filled Rome
With wooing, delicious airs; *your* dome,
Dizzying, serial-spiraled, was a skull
Sucked to the coffered contours of a mind
Breached by infinity. The Infinite!
It made you less as well as more than human;
Implosive, visionary, one hand designed,
The other flogged a workman till he died,
Then drew the sword you fell on like a Roman.

First Bodies

All evening the herds stream from the woods
Down the Interstate, the Palisades,
Dreamy-eyed, tiptoeing does and coral-crowned bucks
Crossing over the water to Manhattan,
Strapped onto roof-racks and the backs of pickup trucks,
Scooped muzzles open as if to nibble
Ribbons of bark, sprigs of bittersweet.

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Still more themselves than anything else
(Scut-hearts flush as milkweed under tails),
They flare through the city in a soft, slow-motion
Fusillade; as estranging, as out of place
Among the iron and cobbles, the callipygean
Bubble-strut of graffiti, as the lead
Lodged in their tight flesh, or as the men,

The blue or white collared blood-brothers
Who got up early in the boroughs
To take their thirsty souls into the wilderness
And drink to the dregs its elixir of bright
Silence and ungridded space, from the tipped back glass
Of cross-hair sights angled through flensed white birch,
Maple scrub and crimson-burred sumac

With a sudden sweet kick of betrayal,
Half-wished, half not what was meant at all,
Gun-smoke and dropped knees insufficient to express
The vanishing tumult of consummation
Or that in spite of appearances tenderness
Was probably the point: love as violence;
Its usual name in the fallen world.

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Two Poems by Mary Oliver

Alligator Poem

I knelt down
at the edge of the water,
and if the white birds standing
in the tops of the trees whistled any warning

I didn't understand,
I drank up to the very moment it came crashing
toward me,
its tail flailing

like a bundle of swords,
slashing the grass,
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth
gaping,

and rimmed with teeth—
and that's how I almost died
of foolishness
in beautiful Florida.

But I didn't.
I leaped aside, and fell,
and it streamed past me, crushing everything in its path
as it swept down to the water

and threw itself in,
and, in the end,
this isn't a poem about foolishness
but about how I rose from the ground

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and saw the world as if for the second time,
the way it really is.
The water, that house of broken glass,
healed itself with a slow whisper

and lay back
with the back-lit light of polished steel,
and the birds, in the unbelievable waterfalls of the trees,
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings,
and drifted away,

while, for a keepsake, and to steady myself,
I reached out,
I picked the wild flowers from the grass around me—
blue stars

and blood-red trumpets
on long green stems—
for hours in my trembling hands they glittered
like fire.

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The Snowshoe Hare

The fox
is so quiet—
he moves like a red rain—
even when his
shoulders tense and then
snuggle down for an instant
against the ground
and the perfect
gate of his teeth
slams shut
there is nothing
you can hear
but the cold creek moving
over the dark pebbles
and across the field
and into the rest of the world—
and even when you find
in the morning
the feathery
scuffs of fur
of the vanished
snowshoe hare
tangled
on the pale spires
of the broken flowers
of the lost summer—
fluttering a little
but only
like the lapping threads
of the wind itself—
there is still
nothing that you can hear
but the cold creek moving
over the old pebbles
and across the field and into
another year.

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Two Poems by Charles Simic

Marina's Epic

The Eskimos were ravaging Peru.
Grandfather fought the Hittites.
Mother sold firecrackers to the Bedouins.

One night when the moon was full
She met the lion who ate Lev Tolstoy.

We were inmates of an orphanage in Kraków;
A prison in Panama;
A school for the blind in Genoa.

My sister insisted on rescuing lady bugs.
Down a succession of gloomy corridors,
She carried the glistening and shivering creature
On the long nail of her index finger.

Our Fate was a crackpot inventor
Working in a garage.

In Paris I knew a Russian lady
Who scrubbed floors at the opera
With a rose between her teeth like Carmen.

Father played a dead man in a German movie.
It was silent. The piano player looked like
Edgar Allan Poe wearing a Moroccan fez.

We stood outside a pink motel in Arizona singing:
"We love you life
Even though you're always laughing at us."

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The next day I joined the Tibetans.
They had a holy mountain
From which one could see Los Angeles.

Sardinian goat cheese, Greek olives, Hungarian
sausage
On the table—
Because memory makes you hungry.

On the back of a sleeping shark
We sailed the stormy Atlantic
Taking turns to mend the rips in the
grandmother's wedding dress
We used as a sail.

In America the movie screens were as big as the
pyramids.

Broadway was a river like the Amazon.
Drowned heads popping up with eyes open:
Ophelias and Valentinos by the thousands.

In Japan they were catching ghosts
With chop sticks.
In Amsterdam there was a Christmas tree
In a whorehouse.

I stood on the corner with the Zulus.
We were waiting for fool's bells,
Gypsy woman's love potion,
General Washington to ride by on his horse
And nod in our direction.

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My Quarrel with the Infinite

I preferred the fleeting,
Like a memory of a sip of wine
Of a noble vintage
On the tongue with eyes closed . . .

When you tapped me on the shoulder.
O light, unsayable in your splendor.
A lot of good you did to me.
You just made my insomnia last longer.

I sat rapt at the spectacle,
Secretly rueing the fugitive:
All its provisory, short-lived
Kisses and enchantments.

Here with the new day breaking,
And a single scarecrow on the horizon
Directing the traffic
Of crows and their shadows.

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doing research on Melville in the South Seas, persuaded Morgan to do the cooking and housekeeping while she finished her thesis. She left him to live with an ~~English~~ Irish poet in Malaga. Morgan took a sabbatical to pull himself together, but it didn't help. One of his last visits with Hal - he was hatless in the winter, with a TWA flight bag, just back from Stockholm - on the escalator in the lobby of the Pennsy station in New York. He inhaled three cigarettes the few minutes they stood talking. He looked worn. Just chatting with Morgan left him winded. A few months later he heard from a mutual friend that Hal had disappeared. ~~With nothing but his flight bag, his baggy suit and vest, his squishy shoes, he had~~ The door to his office stood open, ungraded papers on his desk, ~~a jar full of meter coins, and being a handful of small change emptied from one of his pockets~~ along with the cheap dollar watch that he put out on the lectern to time his lectures. Why did that transport Morgan, on the instant, to the coastal highway south of Pisa where they plodded along in a rain squall, walking their bikes. On a low rise they had paused to look at the sea, swept by tatters of cloud. In a nearby farmyard a white stallion, ~~steaming with the~~ his pelt gleaming with the rain, pranced about like a unicorn, his tail up like a plume. Two men trailed the beast about, waving their arms and hooting The scene ~~for~~ Morgan had a primevl, mythic power, but he had been too miserable to appreciate it. That would come almost 50 years later, on hearing that his companion had disappeared. Morgan had been wrong to let him ~~go on alone~~ push on, ~~in his squishy shoes~~ alone to Calabria. For all of his authority Morgan had always felt him to be vulerable.. He had gone to Calabria, he had returned, he had continued to gadabout in his squishy shoes, but Morgan ~~knew~~ felt keenly that he had failed him. A surge of emotion had compelled him to turn from the man who told him that Hal was missing. His eyes filled. He could not trust himself to speak. ~~His friend accepted it as concern for Hal, but Morgan had been flushed with~~

A manuscript page from the story "To Calabria" by Wright Morris; it was originally published in The New Yorker *and was included in his* Collected Short Stories 1948–1986.

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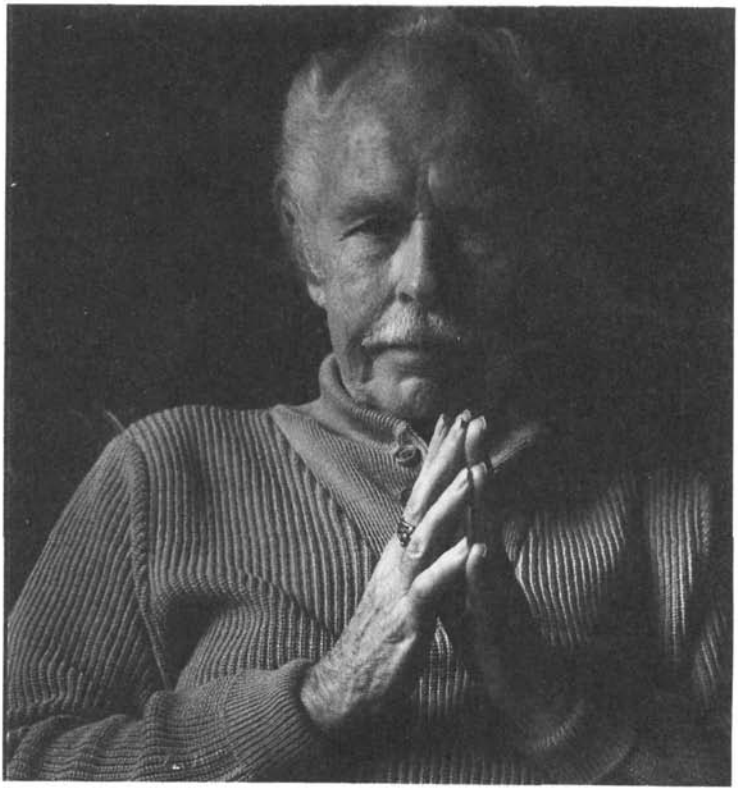

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Wright Morris

The Art of Fiction CXXV

Wright Morris was born in Central City, Nebraska, in 1910 and spent his first ten years in that area. He moved to Chicago in the twenties and then attended Pomona College in California. After a year traveling in Europe in 1933, he settled on the West Coast and began writing and taking photographs. Morris is the author of nineteen novels, including Love among the Cannibals *(1957) and* Fire Sermon *(1971), as well as four books of essays and three volumes of memoirs:* Will's Boy: A Memoir *(1980), which details his childhood years,* Solo: An American Dreamer in Europe, *about his time spent*

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abroad, and finally Cloak of Light *(1985) which deals with his adult life. He has been a Guggenheim Fellow and has been awarded grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In 1956 he won the National Book Award for* The Field of Vision. *More recently Morris received the American Book Award for* Plains Song *(1980). His short stories have been cited by the O. Henry Awards and are regularly included in the* Best American Short Stories *anthologies.*

Morris is also a photographer, and his own stark photographs punctuate the prose in such books as The Inhabitants *(1946),* The Home Place *(1948),* God's Country and My People *(1968) and* Photographs and Words *(1982). "We make to ourselves pictures of facts. The picture is a model of reality"—Morris often uses these words of the philosopher and logician Ludwig Wittgenstein to describe his own creative process. The pictures in his "photo-texts" are based on the details and artifacts of daily life in the small Nebraska towns of the Great Plains where Morris was raised. A portfolio of these pictures and texts from* The Home Place, *now out of print, appears on p. 73 of this interview.*

Morris lives with his wife Josephine in Mill Valley, California, in a small contemporary wooden house tucked into a steep hillside, amidst a profusion of climbing ivy. The house, with its wide balcony, is sheltered by fragrant laurel trees and feels isolated although it is located in the center of Marin County, an area affected by relentless urban growth. Even as the interviewers drove out of San Francisco and across the Golden Gate Bridge, they passed shopping malls where gardens had flourished only last year. The Morrises' immediate neighborhood remains untouched, however, and during the interview birds sang peacefully among the wild forget-me-nots on a bank near their home.

Inside, the house is plain and comfortable. Bookshelves line the living room, where there are deep sofas and piles of newly published art books and magazines. Several photographs by Morris hang on the walls: stark, beautiful images of the plains, the people who once populated them, and the objects they used. Morris also collects prints by the Abstract Expressionists, and a

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black-and-white Gorky hangs over the mantel. An outsized television set stands to the left of the fieldstone fireplace, near an audio system that brings Bach or Vivaldi into the room with an eerie fidelity. Bright striped fabrics and other mementos of Morris's trips to Mexico are scattered about the living room. One of his books lies on the coffee table: Love Affair: A Venetian Journal. *It is the only one of his photo-texts that does not specifically document the American Midwest, as well as the only one with color photographs.*

Wright Morris sat in his favorite vintage Eames chair as he spoke. When the light turned golden at the end of the interview, Jo Morris brought in a tray of tea and cookies and a perfect apple pie.

INTERVIEWER

To this day your fiction is considered experimental. Critics have never had an easy time fitting you into any particular group or movement. How do you see yourself? Do you consider yourself a storyteller?

WRIGHT MORRIS

I can tell a story and often do, but it has never occurred to me to "plot" one. If I'd taken writing courses, as is done today, someone would surely have instructed me in plotting, but I discovered that a narrative could be sustained without plotting, and I have held to that practice.

INTERVIEWER

Since you don't plot, what is it that carries you forward in the narrative?

MORRIS

Let me illustrate: my story, "Victrola," is about an old man and a dog he has inherited from a neighbor. They tolerate—but do not like—each other. The man is ill at ease with the dog's appearance, which he finds pre-

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historic, the head skull-like, the eyes too small, etc. There is a standoff when they look at each other. Predictably, they will have a confrontation. The origin of this is that one day I had seen this creature at the foot of the driveway. His odd appearance disturbed me. His tail did not wag. His short white pelt had been worn through on the high spots. As I approached he turned and slunk away. Not seeing him again, I often thought about him. In my story the character, Bundy, inherits the dog from his neighbor. They are never at ease with each other. Their daily walk is an ordeal for them both. This walk takes place in Mill Valley, where I live, and follows a prescribed route to the village park. Along this route I am scrupulous about details, but all that takes place on the walk is fiction. This commingling of a real place and imagined events provides the framework for my fiction. There is a narrative line but no plot. I accept what happens (what occurs to me) and imagine an appropriate resolution.

INTERVIEWER

What about "voice" in this setup?

MORRIS

The voice of the narrator—the narration—is crucial. If it is right, the narrative seems effortless, with one incident following another, in the manner of letting out a kite's string. I think I came by this manner, this confidence, in the absence of the old-style linear narration—the time that flowed like a river from the past into the future. That is not the way I comprehended time. My time is cyclical—abstract, yet keenly felt. It seems appropriate to the modern consciousness. Fictive moments contain both the past and the future. Joyce captured this complexity in *Ulysses.* My style of plotless narration is one way of appropriating time to my purposes. All reasonably fully conscious people do this. We have no access to the old time, so we make do with our privately spun new

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times. I feel a faintly physical vertigo when I hear of jets that fly faster than sun-time—or in the opposing direction. It ain't natural.

INTERVIEWER

Were you aware of what other writers were doing when you started?

MORRIS

I was slow to read my contemporaries, being too busy writing. I read schoolbooks in grade school; in high school, a book that enthralled me was *Literature and Life.* It began with stories from *Beowulf* and the adventures of King Arthur's knights. Books were not part of my home environment. I read *A Boy's Life* and the Tom Swift series. This absence of books, of what we think of as culture, spared me of having a fix on certain writers, which the young reader is prone to do.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think this contributed to developing your own voice and style of narration?

MORRIS

It left me free from the influence of familiar romances, but encouraged me to take an active part in the vernacular for which I showed some early talent. I was a talker, and took part in class productions of *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer.* That my style is profoundly oral I may owe to this circumstance. The sound is crucial. It frequently leads me to take considerable liberties with the syntax. As Yeats said: "As I altered my syntax, I altered my intellect."

INTERVIEWER

When did you make the decision to be a writer? You took a trip to Europe when you were twenty-three. Did you go there to experience Europe as a writer?

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MORRIS

In my third year of college I read Richard Halliburton's *The Royal Road to Romance.* It inflamed my desire for adventure. The notion of becoming a writer had been planted, but had not crystallized. In the spring I was in Paris. I sometimes played Ping-Pong at the American Club with a young man from Boston. One day he asked me what it was I was writing. Well, what *was* I writing! I gave it a moment's thought. He went on to say he had connections at *The Atlantic,* in case I had something to submit. Trifling incidents like this can crystallize budding sentiments.

INTERVIEWER

Had you written much at the time?

MORRIS

Not a thing! At that time, however, I was reading a novel by Montherlant, *Les Celibataires,* and I identified with the two aging bachelors. Being moved in this way was new to me. I felt a longing to create lifelike characters myself. This latter impression so reinforced the first that I was nudged from the haze of sentiment to actually think of myself as a writer. What was I about to write? Well, let me think!

INTERVIEWER

So you returned determined to write? Did you come back with a desire to recover your past?

MORRIS

The fact that my past was "missing" proved crucial. Back in California was this void—not my recent adventures in Europe—that proved to be my subject. Insofar as I was able, I began at the beginning, like Joyce's "nicens moo cow" coming down along the road to charm the wits out of "baby Tuckoo!" Considering my igno-

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rance it was a bold start. I had both the memory and the words for it. Joyce, of course, covered this ground in a few pages, but I was drilling the well for my past; three hundred pages later I was still preteen, in Nebraska's Platte Valley. I had left the plains, as a boy of nine, with few emotional ties. My mother died at my birth. I had an absentee relationship with my father, who was a kind and affectionate man, and as baffled by me as I was by him. He had married a young Omaha woman closer to my age than to his own. We were soon in Omaha, where I had a *Penrod and Sam* boyhood very dear to a writer of fiction. Five years later we moved to Chicago—another move that I feel to have been destined, and have never exhausted—and from there to college in California. Each of these moves was a form of exile and gifted me with new resources.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see exile as a positive experience for the writer?

MORRIS

Yes. Both the idea and the fact of exile are critical, and especially for me. California has been the beckoning cloudland, to which I often return.

INTERVIEWER

Yet you seem to have proceeded from a sense of life and adventure, rather than from the idea of exile in the service of art.

MORRIS

Yes, that's right. I have been spared the level of sophistication that came naturally to Europeans. Joyce at eighteen, for instance, was more self-aware than I was at forty. I had the advantage of living forty years as a naïf.

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INTERVIEWER

You consider that a literary advantage?

MORRIS

It is, unless you have Joyce's talent. Though nothing happened to Joyce after he left Dublin, his lifework was already laid out in his extraordinary mind. In this respect Joyce was unique even in that very self-conscious era. He was ahead of them all in self-confidence. There's the story about him going to visit Yeats. He hadn't published anything. Yeats says: "Well, how are you, young man?" He waits to be admired, and Joyce just treats him like a has-been.

INTERVIEWER

Are Southern writers an exception to the notion of writers and exile?

MORRIS

Perhaps for the Southern writer the complex problem of being a Southerner is adequate. They too are researching the past. They become exiles through the mere fact that the South is no longer what it was.

INTERVIEWER

Did it ever occur to you to go back to Europe and write over there?

MORRIS

It would have been impossible. Traveling was expensive, and moreover I was never drawn back to Europe for the same reasons that I was drawn elsewhere. With Europe I have only ties that have developed from later interests and tastes, a taste for Venice for instance. Then, of course, the war sealed Europe off.

INTERVIEWER

When you came back from Europe with your mind made up to write, what did you work on?

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MORRIS

Curiously, not a word about my European adventures, though it was material tailored to the needs of a young writer. I turned away from this windfall to recall my boy's life on the plains, a cross-country drive, and the few weeks I had spent on a horse-and-buggy farm. I began with the short, untutored but poetically dense sketches in the manner of the *Spoon River Anthology*—a book I actually had yet to read. Even in the first of these pieces the style and concerns of a lifetime are revealed. They speak with a documentary economy, as if the writer had seen too many Farm Security photographs. I had actually seen none. But on the long drive from New York to California we had crossed the dust bowl of Nebraska, desolate farms, bedraggled remnants of cattle, defeated men and women with the aspect of sharecroppers, towns with idle farmers congregating in squares, or under the shade of trees, or in domino or billiard parlors, where they chewed on four-cent cigars and bore little kinship, it seemed to me, to the people I had seen from the top of a freight car just a year before, traveling east. Many of these men would join the stream of Okies headed for California. I saw them only briefly. I did not fully understand what I was, but it left on my mind's eye the images I would see when I sat down to write. Back in the mid-twenties I had been on the road with my father on our first trip to California, and the reservoir of those impressions awaited me on my return from Europe.

INTERVIEWER

Being on the road seems to be an important source of material for you.

MORRIS

Driving has been an important motif in my life and in my work. My first wife's people lived in Cleveland and we drove there once with a dog—a wonderful beast we were taking care of for a friend. We had to fix him up

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with goggles because he rode with his head out the window, and within twenty-five miles his eyes were watering and he was barking like a fiend. The trick was to get the goggles on while he was otherwise occupied. That dog was all soul. I used this story in several books.

INTERVIEWER

When did you write your first novel, *My Uncle Dudley*?

MORRIS

In the fall of 1940 I took a cross-country photo-safari, collecting *Inhabitants.* By January, I was in Los Angeles, where I holed up in a room near Echo Lake Park, very dear to my past, and in six weeks wrote a draft of *My Uncle Dudley,* a relatively uncluttered retelling of a bizarre and wonderful car trip to California in 1926, just far enough in the past to enhance the nostalgic haze. The book, quite literally, was a retrieval of that piece of my past.

INTERVIEWER

Did the next book come more easily?

MORRIS

The writing of *Dudley* was an act of liberation. For several years I had compressed paragraphs to sentences, and turned away from narrative. *Dudley* is still overly compressed, but it does tell a story in a tradition about which, at the time, I knew nothing. It is so *oral* it is better recited.

INTERVIEWER

Were your circumstances especially favorable for a young writer?

MORRIS

My wife taught school, which made it possible for me to work. She accepted the fact that the writer we both hoped I would be would find it slow going—that's how

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we found it. If a manuscript was returned, and many were, I applied myself and wrote another. I never doubted that when I wrote a good enough book, it would be published. Nor did I lack for any encouragement. William Faulkner's editor, Saxe Commins, waded through my early efforts and urged me to send him more, which I soon did. Some of this self-assurance was hardly to my advantage. I was in no way a student of the novel, who would learn the tricks of the trade and then perform. Each of my manuscripts proved to be a publishing problem. My first editor, Lambert Davis, of Harcourt Brace, gave me everything a young writer should have, including some great lunches. One day in 1945, my agent, Diarmuid Russell, reported that Maxwell Perkins had read *My Uncle Dudley* and liked it. So I was not without a welcome. The advantage of a long apprenticeship is that the writer is spared the sunburst of success when he might not be prepared for it. He is also spared fashionable opinions, and free to make or break them on his own terms.

INTERVIEWER

How did you work at that time? Did you do many drafts?

MORRIS

I did. Perhaps too many. One more draft seemed a small thing for the slopes of Olympus. In the fifties, a very productive period, I seldom wrote less than three or four drafts, the first three single-spaced to save paper. Writing drafts, I soon learned to compose while writing, and this soon reduced their number.

INTERVIEWER

Could you tell us something about you work habits?

MORRIS

I am a creature of habit. As soon as I was able to establish my writing habits—which are to start work in

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the morning and write until hungry, then again in the afternoon until tired—I stuck to this routine most of the days of the week. Once I had learned to compose as I wrote—to make corrections as I went along with a crayon or marking pencil—I would average eight to twelve pages a morning. In time I learned that random breaks—walking around, having a smoke, saving the house from woodpeckers—were creatively helpful. They jogged the mind from its rut, resolved impasses, opened up unforeseen vistas. Since all of my books are closely related, thirty or forty pages into a new book, I would begin to have glimpses of where it was going, and what would follow. *Ceremony in Lone Tree* grew like a branch from a passage in *The World in the Attic, The Field of Vision* from *War Games,* and so on. The disadvantage of these links is that I was never encouraged to stop and take stock, or consider what the public was reading. For better or for worse I was on a time schedule I had invented, doing work I had assigned to myself. Recycling was part of the next step forward, or backward. The loop back before the step forward began with *God's Country and My People,* a book of reappraisal before *Fire Sermon* and *A Life.* The multivoiced fiction of the fifties gave way to a relatively simple narration—the indulgently prodigal writer returning to beginnings.

INTERVIEWER

Do you always work on a typewriter?

MORRIS

Seeing what I have done is important, seeing the way the words fall out, and how I mean to pace them. Seeing the word reassures me about it—as I am reassured or troubled when I pronounce it.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that you have not been working as strenuously, but a great many books have come out in the last five or six years.

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MORRIS

I continue to work because I'm a writer. No cliché is truer than that which says that the writer does not feel fully alive when he isn't writing. He doesn't always feel fully alive writing, but he feels more alive.

INTERVIEWER

Except for that early break when you took photographs, was there ever a period when you did not write?

MORRIS

No, there never was such a period. All that training has turned me into a person with a particular type of consciousness—one made up of a great deal of what I'd call "fictive presence." Often it's the voice I'm working with which dominates; at other times it's one suggested by the events of the day. Whenever I take a walk I become involved in this fashion. It happens almost every day, and it contributes to short stories, which I've been doing recently. I'll see or hear something which will cause me on the instant to experiment with a "narrating voice." A few sentences will get me started. The character and tone of this voice will establish the nature of a story.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that characters develop in this same way, suggested by someone you see or meet?

MORRIS

Oh yes. For instance, I had no conception of the Indian, Blackbird, in *A Life.* I was teaching at Princeton and I encountered an Indian boy from the Hopi tribe. There he was, the real McCoy—not the kind of person to whom you could say, "Let's have a Coke!" I don't think I saw him more than three times. Then he was gone—an isolated memory.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that people take root more solidly in your imagination when you meet them fleetingly?

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MORRIS

Absolutely. This kind of encounter carries within it the virus of suggestion that dreams have. It's the brush you have with death that scares you; certain brief encounters catalyze the imagination in the same way. Fortunately, I think, I'm perfectly willing to let them lie until they ripen.

INTERVIEWER

Don't you note things down?

MORRIS

Constantly, if I am not seated at the typewriter. I once thought I'd use a small tape recorder, but my thinking about the work at hand is closely tied to the physical act of writing—even when the writing proves to be illegible! I could never dictate a work of fiction.

INTERVIEWER

If things are "ripe," as you say, then they resurface when you need them?

MORRIS

Yes. I have never kept a journal. The unavoidably self-conscious tone of a journal is inappropriate to ongoing writing. The attentive reader would sense this instantly, like the change of pitch in a train whistle. Katherine Anne Porter kept a journal, but seldom found that her observations would mesh with what she was writing. In her journal she reported seeing a small boy on a train in Texas with an inverted night pot stuck on his head. His mother was taking him to town to have it removed. He was not in pain, but profoundly humiliated. She described this unforgettably in her journal, yet it was something she never found a place for in her fiction. I would have shaped a new story around it. Perhaps it was, in its pathos, more my sort of material than hers.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think the short story boom has something to do with the proliferation of writing programs?

MORRIS

Without question. Stories are something the talented student can learn to write, but he cannot learn to write a novel, which requires wide resources of experience. Short stories provide a chance for a writer to take certain risks with his own talent.

INTERVIEWER

Is it possible to teach writing?

MORRIS

It is often possible for one writer to help another. I went without this help at my own peril, and it was costly. Yet it is also part of the furrow I plowed—I did it the slow way, and this shaped me as a writer.

INTERVIEWER

What books do you like to teach?

MORRIS

Lawrence's *Women in Love,* Camus's *The Stranger*—but only the first thirty or forty pages!—*The Fall,* the perfect novel of the modern conscience: ambivalent, self-deceiving, self-serving. Something of Thomas Mann, Stein's *Three Lives,* Rilke's *Journal,* Frisch's *I'm Not Stiller* and samplings from *Winesburg, Ohio,* a book created out of "voice," out of vernacular.

INTERVIEWER

It sounds as though you are interested in teaching sections of books.

MORRIS

The whole interests me less than the expressive part, those moments where the writer finds the bloom of his

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talent. Joyce's story "The Dead" is an example. Much that I love about Joyce is in it, free of the orchestrated performance which I admire but do not reread. This is profoundly unfair to many writers, but it brings out the essence of others. I see life in moments, grasp it in moments, and think this is pretty much our modern lot. Wholes escape us, unless we perceive them in a grain of sand. Increasingly, for me, the ambivalence of words is tiresome. They will prove whatever needs to be proved at the moment, and I am weary of these verbal irresolutions. It has led me to take refuge in music. I push a button, and I am overwhelmed with the worlds of Vivaldi, Mozart, Stravinsky. Wordless resolutions to wordless impressions.

My generation, especially, was oversold on the power of words. That's not difficult to understand when you look at the writers who were doing the selling—Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Woolf, Mann, Stein, Lawrence, James. They were convinced that words had the power to resolve our problems. Words and more words—they created a new priesthood of selfhood.

INTERVIEWER

Could you elaborate on that?

MORRIS

James epitomized the principle of being fully conscious with his artistic credo: "To be one on whom nothing is lost." I've always been affected by the sincerity of James's feeling in this matter, yet how could a man with such acute sensibility, with such intuition, ever imagine that "to be one on whom nothing is lost" is a bearable human situation? As acute as his response was to his own social milieu, he had no intuition of what the twentieth century was going to be. Within a few years he was to suffer the full torment of that particular conceit. He was brought to his knees by the First World War, and he never recovered from the shock of it, largely because, as he later

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realized, he had been living in a cuckoo land of his own sensibility. Yet most artists responded to his notion of being one on whom nothing is lost. Except that plebeian, philistine Wells, who was right there to say to James: "You old fraud. You're an amazing man, but really you are quite impossible." My heart goes out to James, but Wells was right.

As I see it, this coincided with Freud's plumbing of the subconscious. I see Freud as a fiction writer, an inspired fiction writer. Words have no other substance—they either convince you by their artistry or else there's nothing there. So here were Freud and James, just in time to cut the last nonconscious ties of man to his time, to his place, to his sense of nature. The fully conscious person became as free and as disconnected as words could possibly make him.

The culmination of James's credo can be seen in Proust's enshrinement of the involuntary memory. At the end of his book Proust's attack on realism and cinematography is an extreme example of the artist displacing life with his own subjective impressions of it. Involuntary impressions take precedence; they become the more ultimate reality. Joyce and Proust and Woolf and dozens of others are figures in the cult of self-consciousness. Ironically their lives were not really equal to the burden of selffulfillment. Joyce's life, for instance, was a tragic life; he paid a price for his self-involvement and he knew it. But it does show the extent to which, in a culture of words, the idea of a supreme self-consciousness was undisputed.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think Joyce was the first artist to see himself exclusively in terms of his art?

MORRIS

I think the notion of men who give themselves to writing as to a mistress began with the romantic poets—

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Shelley, Keats, Byron. They saw the poet as legislator, but of what? The climax of this notion in western sensibility was a vision of the artist moving towards the summit of Olympus. By the time Joyce was published in this country, the concept of Olympus was a rather common one. I don't know of any writer who gives himself entirely to this notion who is not ridiculous.

Lawrence was unique in his ability to bring his perceptions to living, to the here and now, rather than just to the craft of writing. His exile was an escape from literature rather than an escape from life—with the exception of the Great War, when he really became a man in flight. But then he sought to reestablish connections, the same ones he'd gone to such pains to sever, he said: "We cannot bear connection, but we must." His self-consciousness had come full circle.

One man who knew what was happening was Knut Hamsun, a Scandinavian maverick, who wrote *The Growth of the Soil.* It is very long and may seem dated today, but it's one hell of a book about how the obsession with total freedom of the soul is not a resolution of the human condition but rather a predicament. Hamsun was deliberately rejecting the kind of sophistication he felt was destroying Europe. Unfortunately, this led him into the pitfall of sympathy with fascism—as so often happens he backed away from one pit only to fall into another.

In the late thirties, in California, I came upon Hamsun's book and also upon Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers.* Both impressed me profoundly, though Broch's wears better because of his intellectual brilliance. I wrote to him—the first novelist I ever wrote to.

INTERVIEWER

Did he respond?

MORRIS

Many months later I received a letter. Broch was living in Princeton, New Jersey, with the scholar Eric Kahler,

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and Kahler's family, just two blocks away from Albert Einstein. He said that if I came east, I should visit him. Now this was of course just a courtesy letter, but five years later we were living in Haverford, just an hour's ride away, and I called on him. Broch, Kahler, and several of their Austrian friends were sharing a large house, a haven for central European exiles. I had brought along a folio of my *Inhabitants,* photographs and texts. It seemed to me they would find the interlocking of my photos and texts bizarre, but they were responsive to the concept. Broch, in particular, was excited. He insisted I go to New York and show my work to Kurt Wolff of Pantheon Books, though whatever Wolff thought of the concept, he did not see the material as publishable. He was right, of course. Two years later I would persuade—the exact term—Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's to publish the volume by lining the walls of his office with the mounted photographs and texts.

INTERVIEWER

When you speak of connections reestablished, might the end of *Plains Song* be an example?

MORRIS

Yes. Sharon Rose has spent her life severing ties. But she is devastated when she finally returns to her homeplace to find it bulldozed away, the family dispersed. What can she do to be saved? She can try to reestablish consciously the ties to place and people that she has cut. Exile and return for the writer are crucial replays of the flight from constraints and the need for their recovery.

The irony of that phrase of James's, "To be one on whom nothing is lost," lies in the fact that the word "lost," which gives it its power, is somehow incongruous with the notion of total consciousness; the essentially euphoric idea that one is not going to forget anything—the very idea that one could bear such a state—is incompatible with the reality of loss. The moment when one is

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truly aware of loss—loss through death, betrayal, the loss of friendship or self-esteem—that's the moment when one is really beginning to be fully conscious. And there is no cultural accommodation to help me or anyone else deal with these losses.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember some of the first books you bought?

MORRIS

Yes, because there were so few of them. In a bookstore in Waterbury, Connecticut, I bought Katherine Anne Porter's *Pale Horse, Pale Rider.* An extravagance at the time, but I bought it. I did the same on another occasion with Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury.* I still have both of these books. They may have constituted virtually all of my new-book buying. I had become a confirmed used- and remaindered-book buyer. Most of the books I wanted were soon remaindered.

INTERVIEWER

Has publishing changed since you started writing?

MORRIS

Literate men, as well as scholarly men, are giving way to businessmen. The exception proves the rule. And that is one hell of a difference. A big sale for Virginia Woolf was three or four thousand copies. If a book sold that well she was grateful. There's a story about Lawrence that touched me: in a letter he described how he had been able, after many years, to gather together $7,000, the most money he had ever had. I experienced a brief season of affluence from the paperback sale of *Love among the Cannibals,* about $12,000. I remember thinking, what would Lawrence have thought of such a windfall?

(Wright Morris interview continued on p. 88.)

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This portfolio of photographs and text is taken from Wright Morris's 1948 novel, The Home Place, *to illustrate the profound influence of photography on his work. The pictures appear on every other page of the novel, carefully arranged to correspond to the text opposite. Though the fragments excerpted on these fourteen pages are self-contained, the text of the novel is a continuous narrative. Many of the photographs seem to illustrate directly the images or action occurring on the facing pages, but they always go beyond mere exposition, and are as much a part of the fabric of the novel as the text. Others relate more obliquely, establishing a mood or visual backdrop.*

Morris begins The Home Place *with an epigraph from Henry James's* The American Scene:

> *To be at all critically, or as we have been fond of calling it, analytically minded—over and beyond the inherent love of the general many-colored picture of things—is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out: to give out that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter.*

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TO SIT on a straight-backed chair I have to lean forward, on my knees, and look at my hands or something on the floor. On the floor was a piece of worn linoleum. The center of the pattern had been worn off, and Clara had daubed on one of her own. Brown and green dabs of the brush. Uneven rows. I looked through the door at the dining room, the dark-wood chairs spaced on the wall, the cabinet in the corner, the harvest-hand table, the single frosted bulb on the fly-cluttered cord. Everything in its place, its own place, with a frame of space around it. Nothing arranged. No minority groups, that is. No refined caste system for the furniture.

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A BLUE cloud of smoke shot out of the exhaust, the body throbbed with a kind of palsy, she bucked twice, then suddenly jerked out of the garage. She swung around in a half-moon, grazing the bark on the box elder, rattling the harrow, then pulling up, suddenly, facing me. The old man held the wheel like he had a live snake in his hands.

"Dang!" he said, cool enough, "I always forget about that spark."

He kept his hands on the wheel, and lowered the spark with his crooked finger. The palsy stopped, but a soft, lolling roll began. "Well, you comin'?" he said. As the kids were in the front seat, beside him, I had to crawl over the door in the rear. He had a winter top on the Ford, which is a fine thing when it's freezing, but a little less than hell in the summertime. I held on to the braces, and we puttered down the drive.

"Don't she run sweet?" the old man cooed.

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THERE'S a simple reason for grain elevators, as there is for everything, but the force behind the reason, the reason for the reason, is the land and the sky. There's too much sky out here, for one thing, too much horizontal, too many lines without stops, so that the exclamation, the perpendicular, had to come. Anyone who was born and raised on the plains knows that the high false front on the Feed Store, and the white water tower, are not a question of vanity. It's a problem of being. Of knowing you are there. On a good day, with a slanting sun, a man can walk to the edge of his town and see the light on the next town, ten miles away. In the sea of corn, that flash of light is like a sail. It reminds a man the place is still inhabited. I know what it is Ishmael felt, or Ahab, for that matter—these are the whales of the great sea of grass.

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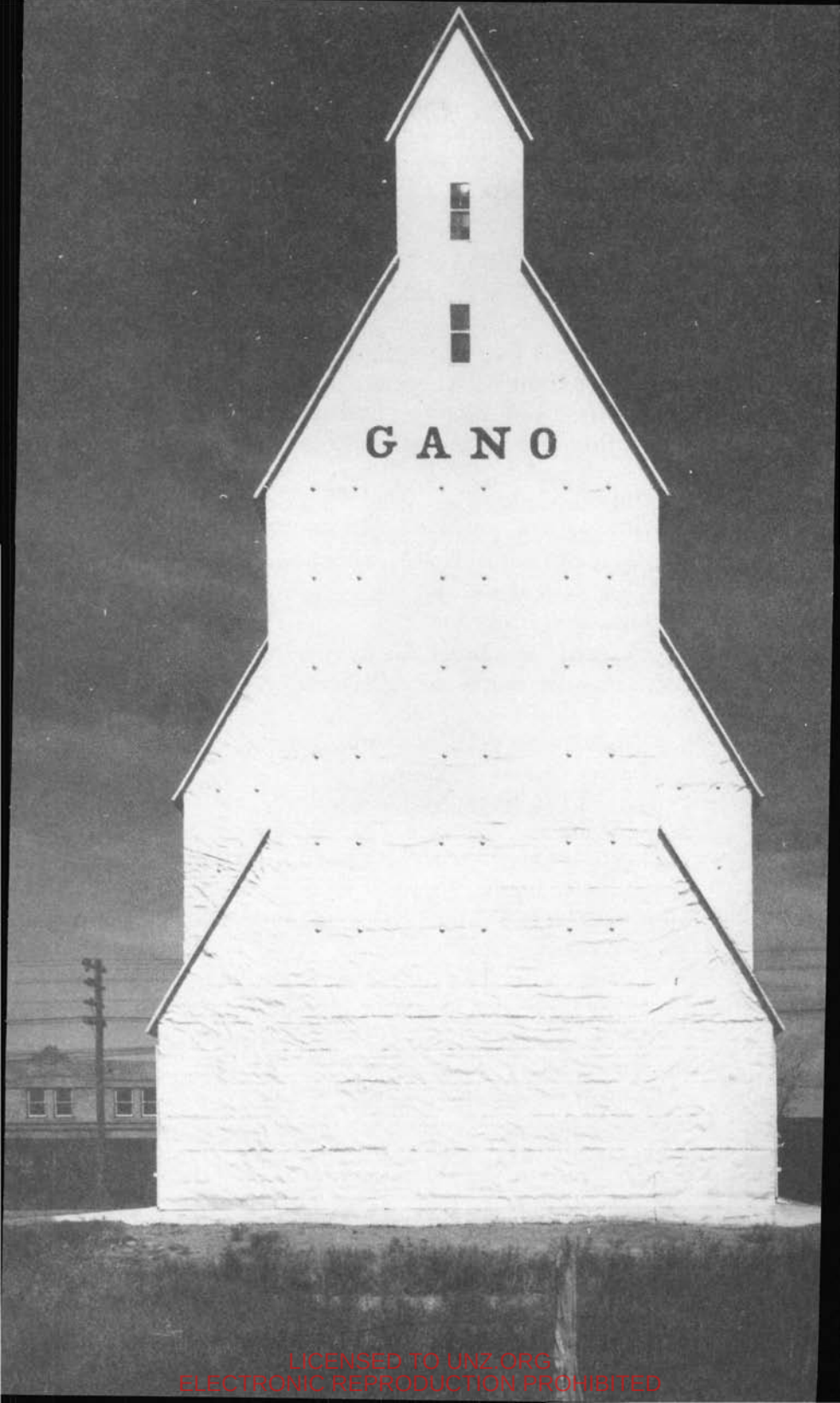

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"FUNNY as a crutch," said Eddie Cahow, and unpinned the cloth from the boy's neck. "There you are, Willie," he said. "A genu-wine G-I Joe."

The boy sat there, looking at his knobby new head in the mirror. There was a short brush of hair at the front, like you find on a used doormat, otherwise he looked quite a bit like he'd been scalped.

"It'll grow back, won't it?" the boy said.

"It'll grow in curly," said Eddie Cahow, "if you pull the white hair from a mare's tail."

"That ain't the way I heard it," I said.

"How'd you hear it?"

"You put the white hairs in a can of sand, and the can in a barrel of rainwater. Fresh rainwater," I said.

"What'll you get?" said the boy.

"Garter snakes," I said.

"That's the truth," said Freddy. "That's the way I heard it." I looked at him, and he nodded his head, soberly. He had a kind of drawl in his voice, with a blurred jews-harp nasal twang about it. I liked him. "How many good live snakes you average?" he said.

"I used to get four or five green striped ones for every long white hair," I said. "But it had to be white. These grayish lookin' hairs gave me pollywogs."

"A good red hair," he said, "will give you some mighty nice fat crawdads. But who wants crawdads?"

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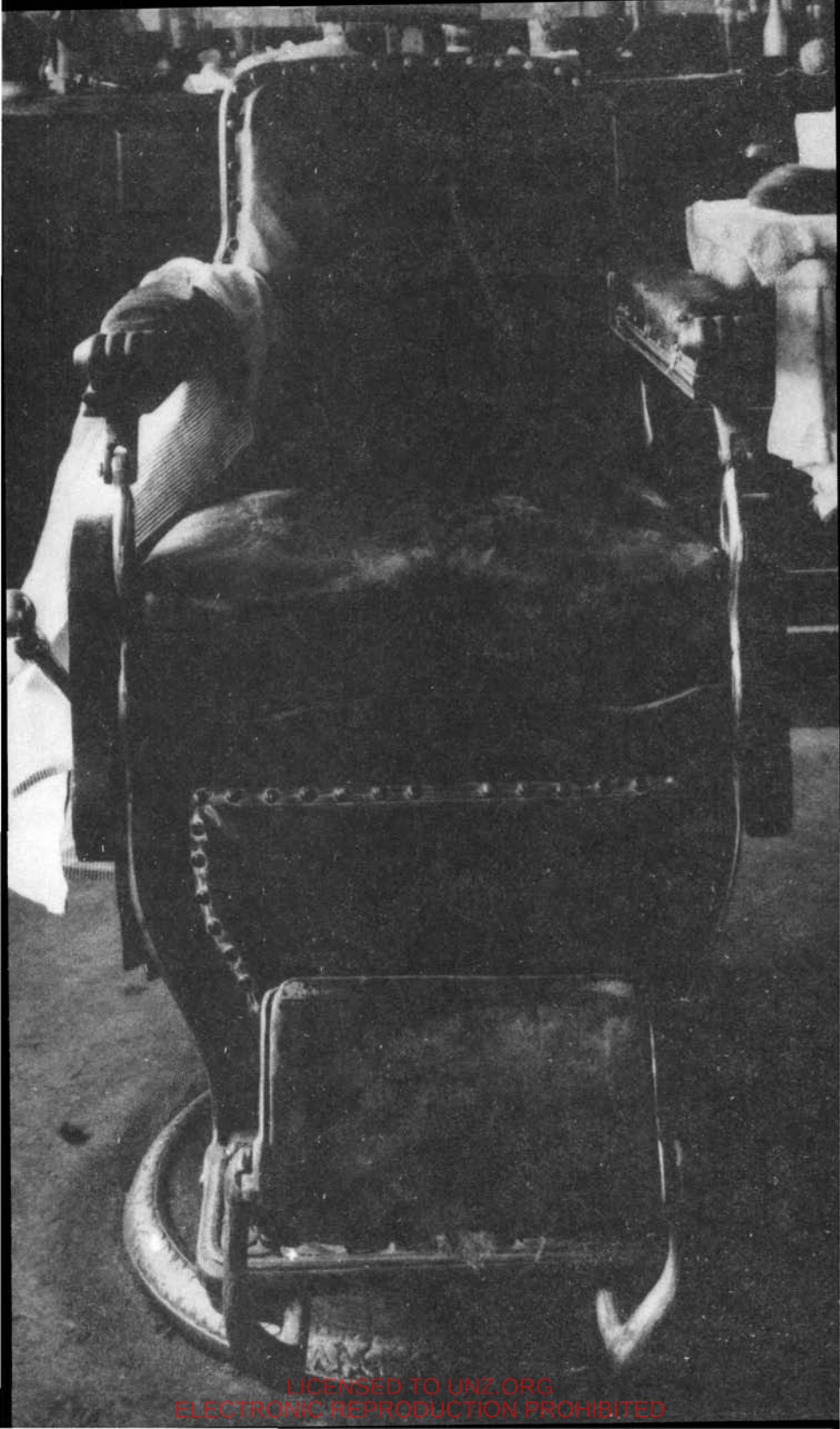

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"THAT'S Ed's room," I said, and my wife stepped up to look at it. Then she backed away, as if she saw someone in the bed. There are hotel beds that give you the feeling of a negative exposed several thousand times, with the blurred image of every human being that has slept in them. Then there are beds with a single image, overexposed. There's an etched clarity about them, like a clean daguerreotype, and you know in your heart that was how the man really looked. There's a question in your mind if any other man, any other human being, could lie in that bed and belong in it. One might as well try and wear the old man's clothes. His shoes, for instance, that had become so much a part of his feet they were like those casts of babies' shoes in department stores. Without saying a word, or snapping her knuckles, my wife turned away.

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THE WORD beauty is not a Protestant thing. It doesn't describe what there is about an old man's shoes. The Protestant word for that is character. Character is supposed to cover what I feel about a cane-seated chair, and the faded bib, with the ironed-in stitches, of an old man's overalls. Character is the word, but it doesn't cover the ground. It doesn't cover what there is moving about it, that is. I say these things are beautiful, but I do so with the understanding that mighty few people anywhere will follow what I mean. That's too bad. For this character is beautiful. I'm not going to labor the point, but there's something about these man-tired things, something added, that is more than character. The same word, but a new specific gravity. Perhaps all I'm saying is that character can be a form of passion, and that some things, these things, have that kind of character. That kind of passion has made them holy things. That kind of holiness, I'd say, is abstinence, frugality and independence—the homegrown, made-on-the-farm trinity. Not the land of plenty, the old-age pension, or the full dinner pail. Independence, not abundance, is the heart of their America.

My wife was looking at me, watching me stare at the old man's shoes.

"What *are* you staring at?" she said.

"The figure in the carpet," I said.

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WHAT IS it that strikes you about a vacant house? I suppose it has something to do with the fact that any house that's been lived in, any room that's been slept in, is not vacant anymore. From that point on it's forever occupied. With the people in the house you tend to forget that, the rooms and the chairs seem normal enough, and you're not upset by the idea of a FOR RENT sign. But with the people gone, you know the place is inhabited. There's something in the rooms, in the air, that raising the windows won't let out, and something in the yard that you can't rake out of the grass. The closets are full of clothes you can't air out. There's a pattern on the walls, where the calendar's hung, and the tipped square of a missing picture is a lidded eye on something private, something better not seen. There's a path worn into the carpet, between the bed and the door, the stove and the table, and where the heel drags, the carpet is gone, worn into the floor. The pattern doesn't come with the house, nor the blueprints with the rug. The figure in the carpet is what you have when the people have lived there, died there, and when evicted, refused to leave the house.

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INTERVIEWER

Why do you think people read books today?

MORRIS

The Book-of-the-Month Club used to print an advertisement showing elegant people at a cocktail party discussing books. People have not discussed books at parties for years, unless book promotion is their business. We discuss movies, because movies are discussable. For one thing, everybody has seen them. Books of interest are complex, and few people are competent to discuss them. One need not have seen a movie, however, to discuss the stars, the director, the reviews. Movies and crime have much in common.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have any comments about contemporary criticism?

MORRIS

Criticism is in the hands of the analysts. Perhaps they feel it is their turn. They too are writers of fiction, but they are no longer readers of it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read criticism of your own work?

MORRIS

If it is favorable.

INTERVIEWER

Who would be the perfect Morris reader?

MORRIS

I get letters from many of them. A sense of humor is essential. I am often a very funny writer. A soft spot for pathos. A tolerance for the ironic. A well-established and chronic inclination to read slowly, and reread the line

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you just slipped by. The writer gave it his full attention. Let the reader do the same.

INTERVIEWER

You've written a lot about the difficulties of the relationships between men and women. Do you see love as a failed myth in our culture today?

MORRIS

I would say that love "American style" is a myth whose origins we have forgotten. Sex is what we remember. The myth is not completely discredited, but I feel the way love is practiced in our culture is destructive. It feeds solely on illusion and doesn't generate any of the energy it should.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see this as a particularly American problem?

MORRIS

God only knows what the consciousness of a central European has become since the Second World War. The psyche has been dislodged, battered, abused. A writer like Kundera is concerned with these things, but I fail to respond to his writing. For me, the energy of sex is powerfully romantic, a notion that is discredited in Kundera's books.

We saw the movie *Swann in Love* the other night. Proust, of course, is a remarkable analyst of romantic love. He feels its essentially destructive nature—everybody being just in love with his or her own illusion of love. A Buñuel film, *That Obscure Object of Desire,* deals with this boldly—a marvelous accounting of infatuation, which makes the sensibility of Proust seem somewhat remote.

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INTERVIEWER

Kundera shows how a romantic love evolves when it is used for political power.

MORRIS

That's exactly why the central European experience is so profoundly different from ours. Our way of treating love is perhaps an attempt to reactivate something that is dead, whereas he at least is looking at the reality of that sentiment's decay. It gives his fiction on this subject a substance which American fiction cannot reach; it's on another plane. In American fiction, stories of defeated romance are just tiresome. The characters experience emotion, but their self-delusion is not interesting. With Kundera they reach the stage of transformation.

INTERVIEWER

Many of your characters experience dramatic transformations.

MORRIS

The idea of transformation captivates me. In a world of change, what other change is so magical, what other change compares with it? When all other options seem closed, transformation provides an escape hatch. In the case of Paul Kahler, for example, first in *War Games,* then in *The Field of Vision,* it seemed to be the lifesaving alternative. I found this both gratifying and plausible because of some hint or vibration of transfiguring changes, *mutatis mutandis,* that are present in much of my fiction. Storytelling, indeed, may have had its origin in such marvels.

INTERVIEWER

In your recent novel, *Plains Song,* there are no successful male-female connections, but there seems to be hope in the possibility of women connecting with each other. Are men less comfortable with the kind of intimate relationships that women find with other women?

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MORRIS

Absolutely. The man does not want intimacy. It's hard to say if that is cultural, or something more profound. Lawrence fought his inability to connect with men all his life. It drove him almost to the point of a breakdown. He had his homoerotic tendencies, but basically what he wanted was simple friendship, and he couldn't get it.

INTERVIEWER

In an interview in 1975 you made a comment about the women in your fiction taking on some of the audacity previously assigned to men. Does that mean you have more faith in the potential of women?

MORRIS

I was enthusiastic at that time because women were beginning to represent an authentic and different force in American life instead of simply echoing or supporting the old ways. I think my first enthusiasms were like any enthusiasms—you're cheering for the side you believe in. I did believe in that side, but I was blind to the fact that for women the very need to compete would prove to be a Trojan horse.

Surely, though, man is more at sea than woman. A woman is less foolish than a man, more of a biological being. She is related to an authentic biological past in a way that man isn't. Woman has had the task of nurturing for a million years. She has a biological self-assurance that makes her a little less subject to the fits of despair that seize man, because he is just not rooted in life as she is.

INTERVIEWER

Has being a photographer influenced your writing?

MORRIS

Very much. I sometimes have a "camera-eye voice." I attempt to perceive what the camera would see. In the opening line of *Ceremony in Lone Tree* I said to the reader, "Come to the window," and presumed to see only what

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the camera would see, without intrusive sentiments or observations. I sought neither to describe nor to arouse emotion, following the aesthetic of the camera and relying solely on the emotion I felt was present in the photograph.

INTERVIEWER

Does this happen naturally, or is it a conscious artifice?

MORRIS

Once I had written the words "come to the window," the scene arranged itself. I became preoccupied with what I was seeing and not thinking of it as a novel. The scene I described was the culmination of my long brooding, an artifact rooted in my imagination, a still life carefully assembled to be photographed. This is not recommended novelistic practice, but a very good example of my obsession with places and artifacts—both the words and many photographs grew from the need I felt to materialize them—a retrieval of the past with a vengeance.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever used actual photographs you've taken as the basis for descriptions in the novels?

MORRIS

I never actually incorporate existing photographs but I use imaginary ones. My way of seeing may be conditioned by the photographing I have done; the imagery is processed by the tone called for by the situation at hand. For instance, there is a scene in *A Life,* about a part of New Mexico which I visited as a boy. There is a rather primitive photograph of my aunt and uncle in front of a shack that figures in a scene of the book, but I did not look at that photograph at the time I was writing the piece. Otherwise I would have been tempted to elaborate in the book on actual visual details. The tone, the

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manner in which that scene is done in the fiction, is so casually right that any elaboration would have been a mistake.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that when a character is closely modeled on a real person it inhibits you?

MORRIS

Yes. Yet the inhibition is part of the atonement, and eases the feelings of guilt. I could not get Gordon Boyd, in *The Field of Vision,* clear of the authorial shadow. In speaking for the author, as he frequently does, he is tied to the author in a way that permanently flaws the portrait. He exists, it seems to me, but I am not pleased with him, as I am with McKee and Lois, or Lehmann and Paula Kahler, other characters who speak through me, but not *of* me.

INTERVIEWER

Which brings us back to the question of the individual and his awareness. Do you think we count for less as individuals than we used to?

MORRIS

Once the question has been asked, we feel that we do count for less. The root of the feeling is having to do with numbers. Numbers exceed our comprehension. I am one of 6.4 billion people. How do we account for what exceeds counting? The burden of such numbers exceeds the weight of gravity. My guess would be that our folly lies not in what threatens us, or even what eludes us, but in our inability to adapt to it. We can adapt to anything, which is why we are here, wherever we are. To be fully conscious of this, and accept it, is precisely what escapes us.

My image of society is of a huge ball of string, the size of a small planet, made up of pieces too short to tie, too

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long to throw away. I see it as something painted by Bosch or Breughel, that rises above the landscape like the tower of Babel.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think we're becoming less aware because the losses we face are so great?

MORRIS

Most of the losses we face are on paper, a loss of words. On the plus side, words are still something that we can share with each other. One-on-one, they still serve the purpose for which they were created: to make it possible for us to be human. On the other hand, they also make possible our escape from that responsibility.

—Olga Carlisle
Jodie Ireland

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from Harlot's Ghost

Norman Mailer

About four weeks after I took the Vow, I had become so marooned in the repetitions of Raymond James Burns's course in World Communism that I made the mistake of yawning in class.

"Hubbard, am I boring you?" Ray Jim asked.

"No, sir."

"I'd like to hear you repeat what I've just said."

I could feel my father's temper stir in me. "Look, Mr. Burns," I said, "I'm not bored. I get it. I know the Communists are treacherous, and double-dealing, and use *agents provocateurs* to try to subvert our labor unions and work double time to befuddle world opinion. I know they have millions of men in their armies getting ready for world domination, but I have to wonder one thing . . ."

"Shoot," he said.

"Well, is every Communist a son of a bitch? I mean, are none of them human? Isn't there one of them somewhere down the line who likes to get drunk just for the

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fun, say, of getting drunk? Must they always have to have a reason for what they're doing?"

I could feel by the shift in the class that I was by now marooned in Harry-Hubbard–Land, population: one. "You've told us," I went on, "that the Communists condition people to the point where they can only receive *approved ideas.* Well, I don't really believe what I'm going to say next, but for the sake of argument"—I was obviously preparing for a graceful exit—"would you say that we're receiving something of the same nature, although different in degree, and, of course, democratic, because I can speak in freedom without reprisals."

"We're here," said Ray Jim, "to sharpen your instincts and your faculties of critical reasoning. That is the opposite of brainwashing. Specious political reasoning is what we're on the lookout for. Find it and uproot it." He was striking the palm of one hand on the back of the other. "Now, I like your example," he said. "It shows critical faculties. Just carry them further. I'm willing to accept the idea that there's a dedicated Communist here and there who might get a hard-on without Party approval, but I'll tell you this. Before long, he's got to decide. Is it his career, or his dick?"

The class laughed with him. "Hubbard," he stated, "you can put all of the Soviet people into three categories. Those who have been in a slave camp, those who are in slave camp now, and those who are waiting to go."

I now rejoined the fold by saying, "Thank you, sir."

One night, visiting the Montagues at their canal house, I brought it up with Hugh. He didn't take long to reply. "Of course the question is more complex than good stalwarts like old Ray Jim would have you know. Why, we're debriefing a Soviet defector right now who's obsessed with one fellow he destroyed, a silly drunk whom he'd encourage to booze up in some black hole of a bar in Siberia. So much anti-Soviet sentiment was milked out of the drunk that not only the poor wretch but all of his family were sent off to a camp. All of them harmless. But

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our defector had a quota of arrests to make, in the same way New York police are given parking tickets to hand out. It revolted him. A human Communist, so to speak."

"Let me ask a stupid question," I started. "Why are Communists so awful?"

"Yes," he said. "Why?" He nodded. "It's very Russian to be awful. Peter the Great once beached a small fleet of his on the bank of some large lake in Pereslavl. Then he didn't go back to the place for thirty years. Of course, his beautiful boats were now not as spanking new as the czar remembered. Sad. They had just about rotted out on the muddy lake shore. Peter's rage is captured in a formal document. 'You, the governors of Pereslavl," went his pronunciamento, 'shall preserve these ships, yachts, and galleys. Should you neglect this obligation,' "—here Harlot's voice rose in imitation of his idea of Peter the Great—" 'you, *and your descendants,* will stand to answer.' "

He nodded. "Extreme, would you say?"

I nodded.

"Normal. That is, normal to the pre-Christian tribal and peasant view of things. Christ not only brought love into the world, but civilization, with all its dubious benefits."

"I don't follow you."

"Well, as I seem to recollect telling you, Christ adjured us to forgive the son for the sins of the father. That's amnesty. It opened the scientific world. Prior to this divine largess, how might a man dare to be a scientist? Any error which proved an insult to nature could bring disaster down on his family.

"The Russians are spiritual, as every Russian will rush to tell you, but their Greek Orthodoxy gagged on that gift from Christ. It would have wrecked the tribal foundations. Forgive the sons? Never. Not in Russia. The punishment must remain greater than the crime. Now they want to march forward into technology land, and they can't. They're too spooked. Deathly afraid of ter-

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rible curses from Mother Nature. If you sin against nature, your sons will perish with you. No wonder Stalin was a total paranoid."

"In that case," I said, "the Russians ought to be easy to overcome."

"Easy," said Harlot, "if the retarded parts of the Third World have a true wish to enter civilization. I'm not sure they do. Backward countries may dream of cars and dams, and rush to pave their swamps, but it's halfhearted. The other half still clings to pre-Christian realms—awe, paranoia, slavish obedience to the leader, divine punishment. The Soviets feel like kin to them. Don't sneer altogether at Bull's-eye Burns. It *is* awful over there in the Soviet. Just today a paper crossed my desk about a sect of twelve poor Doukhobors who were rounded up in some alley of an outlying town in some poor half-forgotten province. The present Soviet leaders know the potential power in a dozen starved clerks and workers. Lenin and Stalin and Trotsky and Bukharin and Zinoviev, all of that top layer, were also a ragtag circle once of impoverished clerks. In consequence, the KGB doesn't cut down the sapling, it looks to extirpate the seed. That has huge effect. Suppose I hand you a six-chamber Colt with one round in it, spin the barrel, and say, 'Now for Russian roulette.' The chances in your favor are five to one as you pull the trigger, but in your heart it will feel no better than even money. Indeed, you probably expect to die. Ditto with extreme punishment. Let it fall on twelve, and twelve million will shiver. Bull's-eye Burns is not so far off the mark."

*

After eight weeks of Mr. Burns's course in the Recreation and Services Building on The Communist Party: Its Theory and Tactics, I could offer exposition on the organization and tactics of the Comintern, the Cominform, the Cheka, the GPU, the NKVD, and the KGB in each

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of its twelve directorates. If the material required memorization of long, inhospitable lists, be certain I devoted the same concentration a medical student gives to his lectures out of the unholy fright that should he fail to store away one item, a future patient might perish. It was tough. Burns stuffed us like sausage. Word passed through the class that he had once been a counterintelligence man in the FBI. No surprise if we had to store away such memorabilia as, "The Eleventh Directorate of the KGB, also called the Guard Directorate, is responsible for safeguarding the security of the presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist party in the USSR." I, who had never found it routine to pay attention while suffering instruction, was now trying to reorganize my nervous system.

Relief was there, however. Tradecraft took you into the storerooms of the Company. We were introduced to the machinery for routing messages through the hierarchy of our offices, and learned how to write in government language (no small matter!). We took instruction in how to compartmentalize an agent's dossier, biographical material in one file, reports on his activities in another. We, too, in the future, would be given our separate cryptonyms for different transactions. Harlot had, at one time, as he later confided to me, eight, one of which was DEUCE. Running an operation in Africa, the tag became LT/DEUCE, LT to indicate that Africa was the theater. Another job in Vienna would list him as RQ/DEUCE, RQ for Austria. Later, during the Austrian endeavor, for one or another reason, he might metamorphose into RQ/GANTRY. Like a lazy body after a week of stiff workouts, my mind, imbibing all this input, felt stiff and sore and livid with new sensation. I thought the change of name itself ought to be enough to alter one's character—ZJ/REPULSE should call for a different personality than MX/LIGHT—my thoughts took sensuous turns. Perhaps it was due to my sexual virginity, but I was now so pervasively libidinous that I could even take plea-

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sure in such courses as Locks and Picks, Flaps and Seals, or Reversibles. Best of all was the mnemotechnic we were provided for recalling telephone numbers. Intimations of buried wealth streamed into strange corners of my psyche.

I was very young. I loved, for example, Flaps and Seals, that is, unsealing letters. Methods ranged from the use of a teakettle spout all the way over to highly classified chemical swabs. By whatever means, I enjoyed the moment when the flap, supposedly protecting inviolable contents, relaxed its grip. The small sound elicited by that act produced what I thought was a private reaction, but the instructor was ahead of me. "Ever hear of the chorus girl who was horny?" he asked our class. "She did a split and stuck to the floor." We moaned at our own merriment.

Then came Reversibles. In preparation for shadowing a man, we practiced quick changes of appearance. We would dart into a vestibule off the classroom, doff our raincoat, turn it inside-out, and reappear (eight seconds allotted) in a tan Burberry rather than a blue waterproof, a simple enough matter, but even as changing one's cryptonym called forth a new potentiality for oneself, so was there a shiver of metamorphosis in this quick change of appearance.

I could say, to stretch a point, that we were being schooled in minor arts of sorcery. Are not espionage and magic analogous to two lovers, meant to meet, who never do? How close they come, all the same! I took unholy enjoyment in the stratagem for memorizing a phone number once that process was mastered. Of course, no immediate gratification was found at first, since there was much stress on the need to concentrate. We would stand at the front of the class and an accomplice walking past us would whisper a telephone number, and move on. Another trainee would come up from the other side to offer one more number. As the exercise grew more demanding, we built to three then five tele-

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phone numbers at once. Finally, we were put into competition: our winner managed to retain nine of ten numbers. (I was, by the way, that winner—which still provides a freshet of recollected glory.)

The point, from which I digress, is that this technique, so full of tension in class, became agreeable on the edge of sleep. The seven digits of a telephone number became a boudoir.

That may be worth expounding upon. We were assigned a specific color for each number. White represented zero; yellow was 1; green equaled 2; blue, 3; purple, 4; red, 5; orange, 6; brown, 7; gray, 8; black, 9.

Next, we were asked to visualize a wall, a table, and a lamp. If the first three digits of the telephone number were 586, we were to picture a red wall behind a gray table on which was sitting an orange lamp. For the succeeding four numbers, we might visualize a woman in a purple jacket, green skirt, and yellow shoes sitting on an orange chair. That was our mental notation for 4216. By such means, 586-4216 had been converted into a picture with seven colored objects. Today, in training, the area code has to be added. Now, the room has a window to look out on sky, water, and earth, a woe my class did not suffer. I think of brown sky, red water, and blue earth for the area code 753, a bad day for Gauguin! We learned our stuff, however, in 1955, and so had to visualize no more at the sound of 436-9940, than a purple wall, a blue table, and an orange lamp. Our lady—Yolanda was the name we gave her—sat in the purple room with the blue table and the orange lamp; she was wearing a black jacket, black pants, and purple shoes as she installed herself on her white chair: Miss 436-9940. It seems like the long way around, but I became so proficient at these equivalents that I saw hues as soon as I heard numbers.

We were taught to use invisible inks which reminded me, I cannot quite say why, of my mother: perhaps it was her disinterest in any information available to all.

We can skip over lock-picking. Those simple but ele-

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gant swages we employed are still marked SECRET, and for a junior officer trainee like myself, able to find sexual stir in the flap of an envelope, what was to be said for cracking a door? That was primal stuff. Each lecturer took entitlement to one off-key joke, and for this course, our instructor was there to tell us: "If you can't figure out a way to get this little pick into this old lock, well, fellows, I don't know what you'll do when you get older."

I never did use lock-picking until 1972 when I had all but forgotten the techniques. Then I used it in the White House, and twice in five minutes, once to open a door, once to open a desk, but that is down the road. Codes is next on my list, but I do not care to get into Codes either for its study took up a good many hours during winter and spring in Washington, and it is certainly too technical a subject. I will say that it was so sealed a curriculum that even the cryptographic labs were an introduction into the logic of real security: barred windows on either side of the hall; credentials necessary in every section; receptionists and armed guards; even food servers for the special prepackaged sandwiches in the cryptographer's cafeteria were chosen because they were blind and so could never identify any of the workers in Codes by photographs if, perchance, the KGB got a hold of one of them.

Let me move to a more agreeable discipline. Anyone who has read a spy novel is familiar with dead drops, but active instruction in the practice is another matter. All twenty-three trainees in my class left our homeroom, and filed down the corridor past the bulletin board notices to the men's lavatory where, predictably, ritual jokes were offered to the lone woman in our group; she, in ritual repayment, was good enough to blush. For that matter, I felt my cheeks reddening. I was uncomfortably aware of the unabashed odor coming up from the open urinals, but then 1955 is a long time ago.

Our first dead drop! The instructor took a handful of paper towels out of the metal dispenser by the sink, removed a roll of 16-mm Minox film, the size of a thimble, from his vest pocket, put it in the dispenser, and

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replaced the towels. In turn, to much laughter, each of us repeated the act. The laughter derived, I believe, from how quickly a few of us could accomplish it and how slow were the others. Soon the paper towels were hopelessly mangled. Admonished to practice on our own, we were then shown other possibilities to be extracted from this same restroom, including the cardboard cylinder at the core of the toilet-paper roll. Such dead drops, we were assured, were only suitable when the contact could make rendezvous soon after. Brush drops, therefore, were preferable. You did not have to worry whether the agent had found your parcel.

To become familiar with brush drops, we were taken on a field tour to the aisles of a Washington, D.C. supermarket. Having enriched my shopping basket with a can of Campbell's Tomato Soup and a pound of Armour's Hickory Smoked Bacon, I bumped into my assigned mate, and in the course of such collision, managed to drop a roll of film into his basket, after which, exchanging apologies, we moved on.

It must have looked odd to any housewife buying food. The aisles, invariably empty at midmorning, were now packed with a platoon of men bumping vigorously into one another and whispering loudly, "No, you hacker, it's my turn." What can I add? The brush was electric. One waited for sparks to jump from basket to basket.

Later that night we were taken on a tour of a private estate beyond Chevy Chase and given further instruction in dead drops, for more rural areas. If, for example, the agent liked to take daily walks in the country, we looked for a loose brick in a garden wall, or a split in a dead elm. I became aware all over again of the cavernous recesses in a tree trunk. Groping about in the dark of the estate forest, my crevice seemed hairy. What a transaction! I could not find the film at first, and when I did, whipped my hand out so quickly as to draw a remonstrance from the instructor, "Casual, buddy, keep the thing casual."

On our last night, Bull's-eye Burns threw a party for

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our class in his small apartment in a newly built four-story complex of middle-cost housing in the outskirts of Alexandria, Virginia. He had three kids, all boys, all towheads, and I learned on this night that he and his wife were high school sweethearts from Indiana. Mrs. Burns, plain faced, slab shaped, served us the casserole dish of cheese and tuna and hot dog relish that had been her party fare for twenty years. (Or, as she called it, her "main-eventer.") It was obvious that she and Ray Jim barely bothered to speak to each other anymore, and I must say I studied them like a foreign student looking for insight into American customs of the Midwest and the Southwest. I concluded that people like Ray Jim did not quit their marriages unless they were feeling overly inclined to take an ax to their mate.

So I was surprised at how good the casserole tasted. Somehow, it did. We were eating in the fold of the Vow and drinking what Ray Jim called, "My favorite Italian red ink. It's my favorite because it's cheap."

A junior officer trainee named Murphy started to jibe at Bull's-eye Burns. "All right, sir," he said, "for eight weeks you have given us JOTs a lot of hints about how you guys dispose of spooks. In special circumstances, that is."

"Yessir," said Ray Jim, the arm holding his glass became as stiff as erectile tissue.

"Well, sir, to satisfy our ravenous class curiosity, did you ever personally pull the plug on a double-crossing foreign individual?"

"Decline comment."

"Never had to call on your Browning?" asked Murphy. "Not even once?"

"Policy is against drastic termination," Burns stated. "Individual solutions cannot be, however, a priori disallowed." He made a point of staring straight ahead.

"I get it," said Murphy, making a pistol of his forefinger and fist. "Ping, ping," he said, offering two shots. I was one of the men who made the mistake of laughing.

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We were not to get away unmarked. After supper, Burns took out a tin box from which he extracted bits of note paper one by one. "I collect doodles," he said, "from the work desks of the junior officer trainees. I recommend their study." He held one up, squinted, and said, "This is Murphy's. Shows he is impulsive, and self-destructive."

By now, a lot of us were drunk on vino tinto, and we jeered at Murphy, who had a habit of punching hallway walls in the YMCA when he got drunk.

"This doodle is Schultz's. Schultz, are you ready?"

"Yessir."

"You are showing me what I know already."

"Yessir. What is it, sir?"

"You, Schultz, are tight as a tick."

It was my turn.

"Hubbard, your doodle is one hell of a dilly."

"Yessir."

"It shows that you are up to something difficult."

"What, sir?" I made the mistake of asking.

"You are engaged in the attempt to fly up your asshole."

I think he had time to offer his kind verdict on ten more of us before my normal pulse came back to me. On to the Farm!

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Alfred Corn

La Madeleine

I

Posters of Juliette Greco, the Eiffel
Tower. A good French bistro in the Village,
Its cuisine by some oversight not yet
Widely known; all the more murmured over
By our party of four avid diners,
Leaning forward over the red-checked cloth.
First course dispatched in record time, I could
Be more deliberate with the second,
Enough to admire each tender forkful
Of the fragrant *Coquille St. Jacques,* steaming
In its ribbed scallop shell—eyes even so
Straying to glance at plates on either side.
In fact, we all sampled each other's entrée
And, satisfied, returned to our first choice.
When time came to moan at the dessert list,
Among the dazzlements our friend Richard,
The translator of Proust, saw handwritten
Copperplate flourishes near the bottom
Propose *Compote de Fraises avec Madeleines.*
In lieu of some duller, full-dress homage,
We had them brought for all of us, berries
In red syrup, plus moist, butter-and-egg
Cakes, fluted backs golden by candlelight.
Why *don't* they call these little scallop shells
Les biscuits St. Jacques? No, another more
Romantic saint has given them her name.
(Mary Magdalene's the revered object
Of pilgrimages as well, her grotto
In Provence—but let's postpone that visit.)

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My story over coffee
Began with a concert given at La Madeleine,
The church disguised as a svelte Greek temple,
Where Parisians rich or devout or both at once
Come to see and be seen or, who knows, seek
Forgiveness for sins like self-righteousness.
Still queasy from a three-hour lunch, never mind,
I'd bought my ticket, let music be the tonic
For day-of-arrival hyperactivity. . . .
Ushers were all women of the congregation,
Older, *soignées,* managing subtly to convey
The impression that each was the finer, calmer
Outcome of a worldly personal history now
Put aside in favor of good works and some ideal
Of repose. The one who seated me, gray silk jacket
Over pleated mauve *charmeuse,* smiled and gravely
Searched my eyes as I did hers, both of us refreshed,
I think, poised at ready for an hour of colliding
Gold reverberations, courtesy of Gabrieli. . . .
A week later in a ward of the American Hospital
I saw that same devout double of Jeanne Moreau
Making what looked like a round of volunteer
Visits to the dying—one of them a friend
I'd come to see. The image surviving, framed
Against starched white bedclothes, is a dark profile
Bent slightly forward as she takes the elderly,
Mottled hand of a patient, his health now broken,
Yet only a year ago young and strong and immune.

II

Proust would have been a *flâneur* in La Madeleine,
Along with how many prototypes of Odette de Crécy.
And what did he know about its patroness?
A few paintings from the Louvre or Venice,
Namesake heroines in Balzac and Fromentin,
Plus his own in the story *L'Indifférent.* . . . I
Remember from a visit to Galilee (four years

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Now) on our drive north along the bluegreen lake,
A signpost marked *MIGDAL* (in Hebrew: "tower").
That must have been, seventy generations back,
The place of origin of Saint Mary, Jesus' friend,
The only woman that might count as a disciple
And first to recognize, according to Saint John,
Her risen Lord. Whether as well the suppliant
Who wept at Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair,
Sumptuous, "a great sinner," with gold to spend
For an alabaster vase of fragrant spikenard—
Well, tradition's the richer for having thought so.
Because of their devotion, Mary of Magdala
And the Beloved Disciple in time emerged
As closest to his heart—with iconic appeal as well,
To judge by Renaissance art and its aftermath.
"Let him who is without sin cast the first stone at her."
Weakness of the flesh was routine, so decreed
The late church fathers as the taxonomy
Of transgression was being drafted. Witness
Paolo and Francesca, lovers whose misdeed
Weighed just enough to earn them a fiery nest
At the whirlwind's heart in upper Inferno—
And perpetual fame in the Testament of Beauty.

III

You were one of those four at dinner, remember?
Any candlelit meal by extension also serves
To celebrate years of settled union. The lens
Of the mind's eye is I guess appropriately
Vaselined by time so that scenes from the life
Return in a tender, peach-toned soft-focus.
Happy years? Yes, at first. Afterward, four or five
Spent *together* at least, trying to remember
Happiness is only one kind of fulfillment.

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A riddle to imagine how you see us now—
But then, I never knew, not even in the early days,
Before you came to see larks and sparks (Parents,
Avoid them) as betrayal pure and simple.
Thinking of you intent on *Pelléas* (Act III:
Mélisande leans from a tower window and lets
Yards of golden hair cascade over her lover),
Your right hand aloft and darting, to assist
The maestro; or tickled by a page in Colette;
Or quoting an Auden line that seemed to hold
All wisdom, who wouldn't assume words and music
Had some point for you in mere experience,
Were more than self-enclosed palaces of art,
In fact, offered shelter and counsel even to us
With our grouches, *gourmandise,* and dirty socks?
No? On conduct taken for granted in Bloomsbury
Or Montmartre down came a gavel termed *Love.*
The daze of seeing you doubt I did, the jolt
Of hearing instinct or impulse interpreted
As callousness aforethought—one more lesson
In the power of words, nothing like clock hands
Unfailingly recycled to the harmless
Hour before what was said was said. . . . Two years
along,
I can see, though, that time is absolution, and many
Rehearsals have now sublimed the old debate
Into light breezes like those the opera chorus
Irresistibly wafted into the key of F major,
Or like a barcarole, a waltz, a cradle song—
"Lay your sleeping head, my love, human. . . ."

IV

Faceless harm, invasions up from the id,
That underworld mined with caverns accessible
Only through the Gate of Horn, or the maudlin
Inarticulation that overflows censorship

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When we stretch out for today's analysis
In the position of love and sleep and death.
Where does the violence come from, and who
Is being killed. . . . The uninnocent cast a stone,
And another and another, heaping a rubble cairn
Over the buried victim's blood-soaked clothes,
That fossilized taboos, appearances, the will
Of the majority, this time also be enforced.

V

Those travels in the provinces,
Up mountain to Vézelay;
Or underground in Lascaux
To trace vestiges left
By a social unit clothed
In half-cured pelts of a mammal
Cousin at many removes,
First effort to draw a fine
Distinction between the human
And the animal. Outlines
Of aurochs, stag, and ibex
In soot or manganese
Dredge up iconic imprints
Of internal prehistory—
Attraction and disgust
At the touch of a furred flank,
Perceived at once as foe
And bloodhot, maternal
Source of nourishment.
Would the stag at last forgive us
For bringing him down with a spear,
And send us more of his kind
In seasons to come? Only
If we kept his image alive

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In a vault deep underground,
Where humid aeons he ranged
Among four-legged fellows
At ease in the limestone fields
Enclosing a pitch darkness
Now and then broken when swaying
Torch lights rounded a veer
In the cave (distant, inverse
Forbear of the high-rise),
Like a long chain of molten
Gold, to bring new cravings,
Forms, propitiations,
To hallowed flocks already
Portrayed by an earlier art,
Memorial of what's called
(After the cave's first name)
The Magdalenian culture.

A pause here before I forget
(Sympathy for the waiter
With several plates on his arm)
To mention Sainte-Baume, Mary's
Hermitage late in life.
Golden Legend recounts
How with Martha and Lazarus
She sailed to Gaul, arriving
At Roman Marsilia,
Where (the spirit's wings
Widespread) she preached in *koinē*
To listening multitudes
Of stolid barbarians—
And, years after, withdrew
To a hillside cave near Aix,
Her final days told out
In prayerful penitence,
Itself the fragrant balm

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Preparing her body for death.
Today's visitor enters
A humid darkness, the rough
Stone floor cratered with puddles
Reflecting liquid shards
Of larkspur blue and scarlet
From stained-glass ogive windows.
In cool silence you may
Say a prayer to the saint,
Rise and find a path
Through trembling, jewellike water,
Pause at the door to look back—
Then exit into the whitehot
Sun towering over the Midi.

VI

Feast of St. James, 1989

Dear David, Happy fifty-sixth birthday. Shall I
This time write (as I daily think of you)
And allow friendship to go on evolving—
In some ways more evenhanded than back
When you were with us, subject to wincing
Stresses the temple of the body has to bear,
Hunger pangs, noise, fatigue, bronchitis.
The week of your death, along Village sidewalks
Linden flowers dusted the air with the faint
Potpourri that will now always summon up,
In bouts of silent thought, our own *belle époque. . . .*

At any dinner party the best finale was you,
A compote of phrases derived from native wit
And close readings of the Elizabethans,
James, Yeats, Stevens, and *The Remembrance.*

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Involuntary allusion smiles and sees you
As a second Charles Swann, relaxed and upright
In a *traghetto* as you skimmed across the Canal
Under the shadow of Santa Maria della Salute
To lend some luster to a gathering where,
Apparently, simply leaning against a door,
Arms folded, face lit by an amused, benign
Expression, could magnetize them to your side,
Eager for smiling urbanity's angle on whatever
Venice might be buzzing about that given day.
You had (outside *Swan Lake*) no single Odette,
Rather, a series, cygnet after black or white
Cygnet, whom with a twinkle you brought to parties
(Depending) or skipped parties to stay home with.
Memory's parenthetical invasions of the daily
Round promise to keep you now and future decades
The faithful companion of my "decrepit age,"
As Yeats ("The Tower") called the rest of his climb.

Venice from time immemorial beset by plagues,
No surprise should the palazzo's proprietress,
Hearing of your condition, panic and with all
The innocence of misinformation have your floor
Fumigated, clouds of tear gas mingling with those
In the library ceiling's frescoes. . . . When you turned
For a last look at the Barbaro (before the long
"Wreck of the body, the slow decay of blood"),
slimegreen
Waves at work to dissolve how many surrounding
Morose or fanciful *façades*, over the Mahlerian rush
Of waters and motors, bells tolling from the distant
Campanile, dialect outcries, adagio strings
Wafting across the Canal, was there also, if heard
Only in the inner ear, a faintly beating sibilance,
Descending, settling to rest, the wings of the dove?

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VII

La Maddalena

The baroque streetwalker Caravaggio painted,
His contemporary, a piece of cake from Trastevere
In Fortuny brocade, slumped in a chair by cast-off
Finery, serpentine chains of massive gold,
A broken string of pearls, vial of fragrant oil
She can no longer pour over the Master's head
And anoint him king. Head bowed, auburn hair
Streaming over the shoulders, behold a type
Of the unfaithful, returned from the fleshpots,
Agonized and with no intimation that dawning
Day in a garden outside the city will find her
Weeping by the tomb (*Elle a pleuré comme*
Une Madeleine, as older women used to say),
Only to hear her name and answer, "*Rabboni!*"
Then be commanded to go and tell the brothers,
Her "I have seen the Lord!" echoing down
Twenty centuries in the breaking of the bread—
Whenever broken "for the remembrance of me."

VIII

Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, 1990

Mary of Magdala,
Vividest apostle,
Teach me to be faithful;

And to discount mistakes
Others may have made
Out of pain and confusion.

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Pray for the sick, the dying,
And those who watch at their side.
Help us to dry our tears;

Or, if they will not cease,
Then let them bathe the feet
Of our best advocate.

At each new step of the stair,
Blessed Mary, pray for us—
And remember us on that day.

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Cynthia Nadelman

Naming the Birds

Why do it? shrilled the bird,
the as-yet-unnamed, a
candidate for new coinage,
namely widewit,
a species we can safely
say, today, we have newly defined.
The literature, in general
answerable for every detail of
speech, flight and nesting,
patterns of calls, patterns
of travel, as well as explaining the
anecdote, has nothing on the widewit.

Good with imperatives, the Book
finds names for subliminal
thoughts, the whisper of conscience:
Whip-poor-will, the hibernator,
and Drink your tea!
Twee, tweet, Tow-hee.
When we see it,
we're pleased. The flycatcher
wheeps! almost mockingly, finally
monotonously. Who decided
what they'd say, and whether to
call them by that name?
Perhaps some Victorian neurasthenic, or worse,
hearing through a window the voices
that wouldn't be quelled.

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And how passed on, this aural cousin
of Rorschach's pretty test,
with the readings already decided?
What do the birds say in other countries?
And what will be remembered of us
if only the bird books survive?
It no more matters than in foreign opera
what is meant by the singers.
We invent, knowing vaguely
it's about property, parentage, sex.
We think we know a better script.
And we do it.
Now, on to daisy fleabane and largemouth bass.

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Agha Shahid Ali

A Nostalgist's Map of America

A Route of Evanescence
With a revolving Wheel—
A Resonance of Emerald—
A Rush of Cochineal—
And every Blossom on the Bush
Adjusts its tumbled Head—
The mail from Tunis, probably,
An easy Morning's Ride—

—Emily Dickinson

The trees were soon hushed in the resonance
of darkest emerald as we rushed by
on 322, that route which took us from
the dead center of Pennsylvania

(a stone marks it) to a suburb ten miles
from Philadelphia. "A hummingbird,"
I said, after a sharp turn, then pointed
to the wheel, still revolving in your hand.

I gave Emily Dickinson to you then,
line after line, complete from heart. The signs
on Schuylkill Expressway fell neat behind us.
I went further: "Let's pretend your city

is Evanescence—There has to be one—
in Pennsylvania—And that some day—
the Bird will carry—my letters—to you—
from Tunis—or Casablanca—the mail

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an easy night's ride—from North Africa."
I'm making this up, I know, but since you
were there, none of it's a lie. How did I
go on? "Wings will rush by when the exit

to Evanescence is barely a mile?"
The sky was dark teal, the moon was rising.
"It always rains on this route," I went on,
"which takes you back, back to Evanescence,

your boyhood town." You said *this* was summer,
this final end of school, this coming home
to Philadelphia, WMMR
as soon as you could catch it. What song first

came on? It must have been a disco hit,
one whose singer no one recalls. It's six,
perhaps seven years since then, since you last
wrote. And yesterday when you phoned, I said,

"I knew you'd call," even before you could
say who you were. "I am in Irvine now
with my lover, just an hour from Tucson,
and the flights are cheap." "Then we'll meet often."

For a moment you were silent, and then,
"Shahid, I'm dying." I kept speaking to you
after I hung up, my voice the quickest
mail, a cracked disk with many endings,

each false: One: "I live in Evanescence
(I had to build it, for America
was without one). All is safe here with me.
Come to my street, disguised in the climate

of Southern California. Surprise
me when I open the door. Unload skies
of rain from your distance-drenched arms." Or this:
"Here in Evanescence (which I found—though

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not in Pennsylvania—after I last
wrote), the eavesdropping willows write brief notes
on grass, then hide them in shadows of trunks.
I'd love to see you. Come as you are." And

this, the least false: "You said each month you need
new blood. Please forgive me, Phil, but I thought
of your pain as a formal feeling, one
useful for the letting go, your transfusions

mere wings to me, the push of numerous
hummingbirds, souvenirs of Evanescence
seen disappearing down a route of veins
in an electric rush of cochineal."

for Philip Paul Orlando

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Today I Drove along the Rio Grande

Jack Balas

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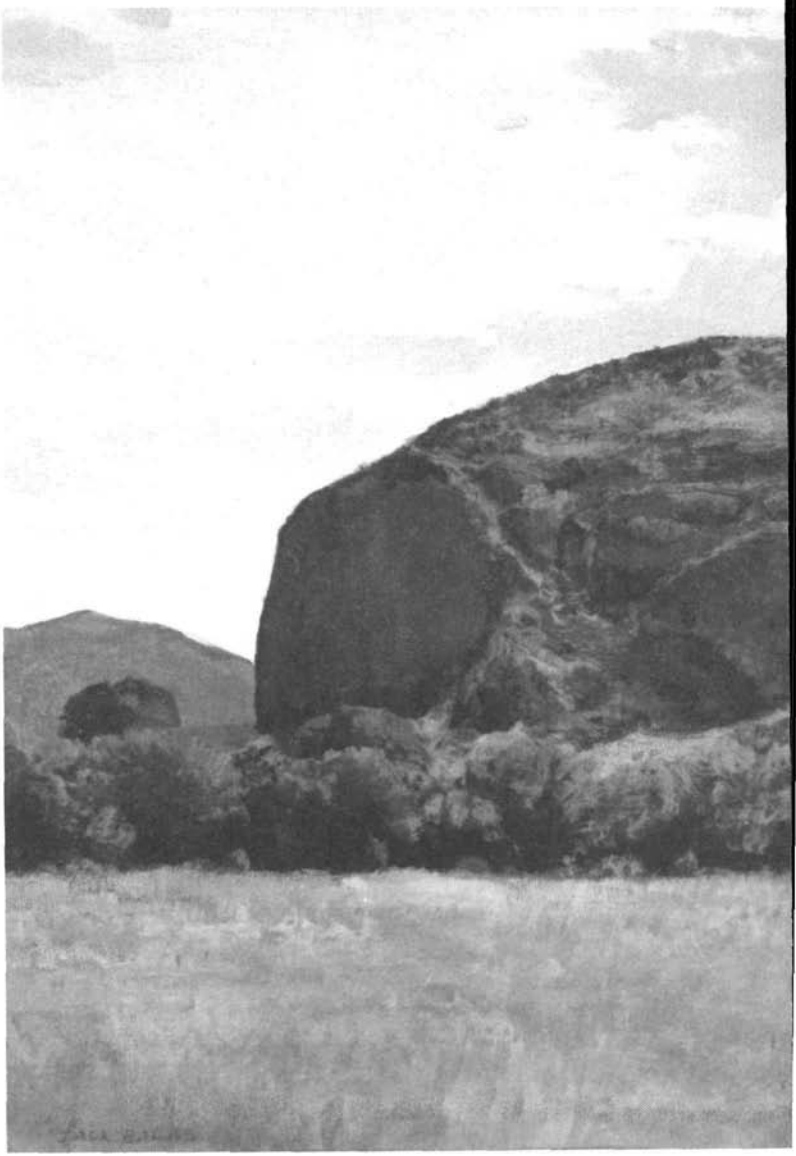

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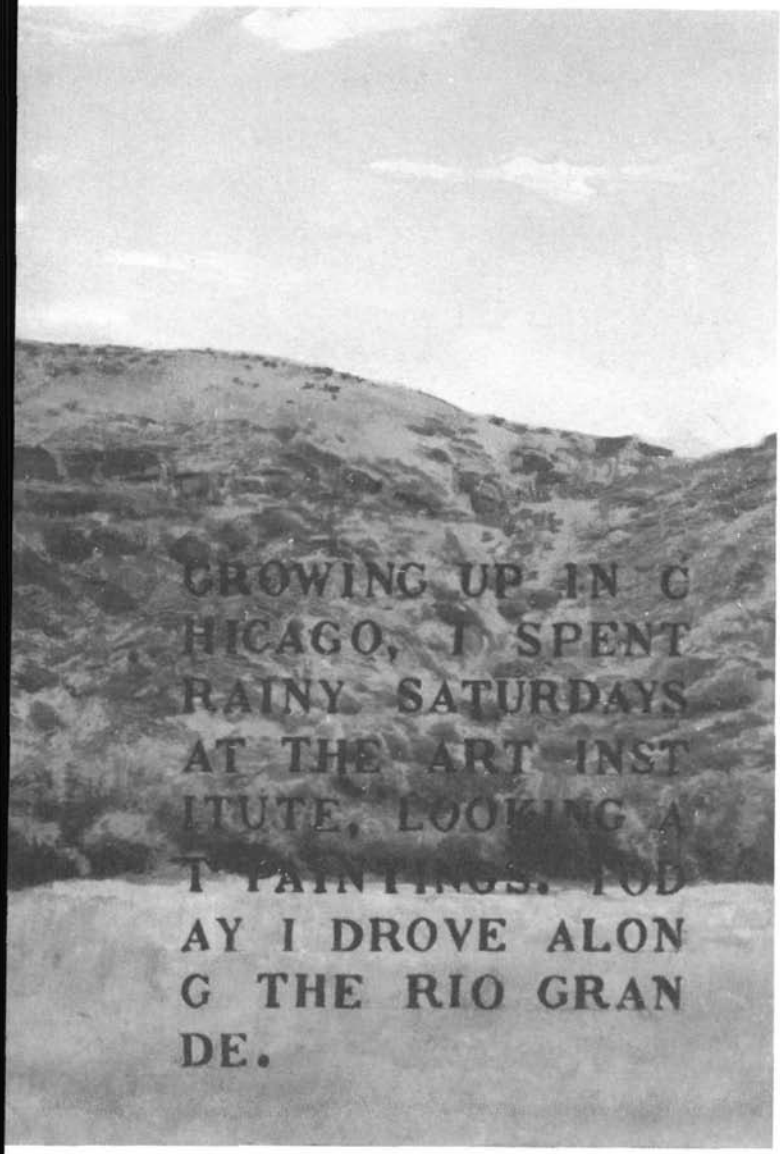

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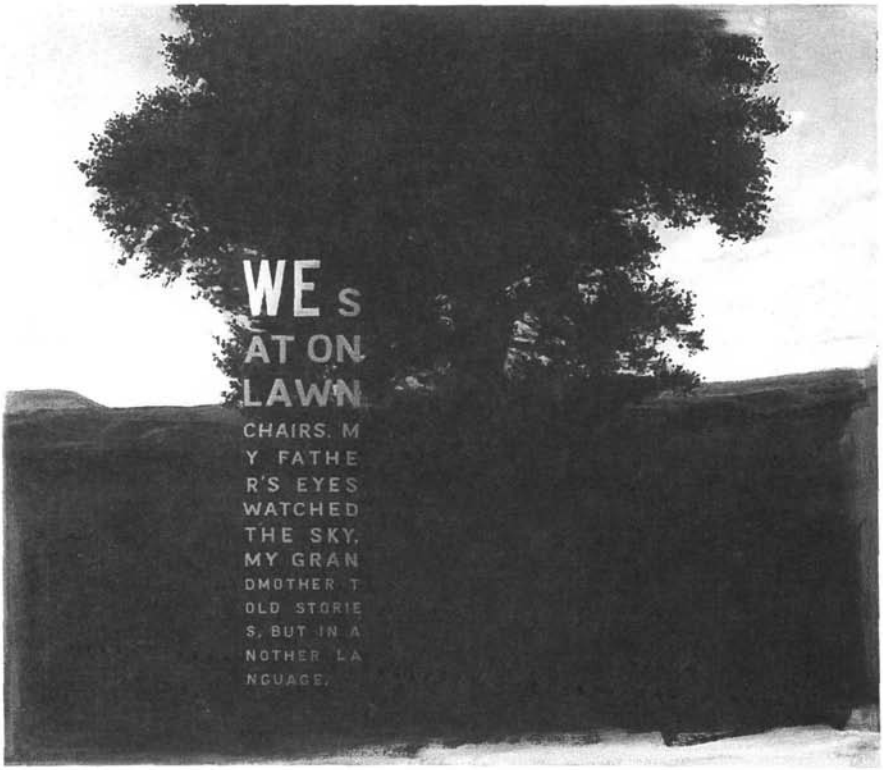

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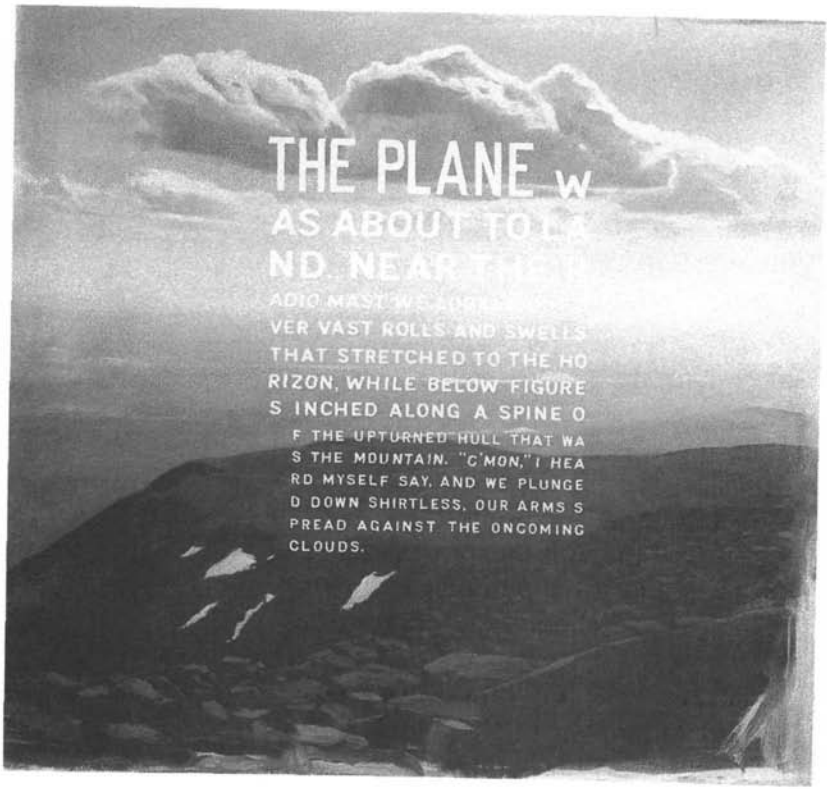
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S INCHED ALONG A SPINE O
F THE UPTURNED HULL THAT WA
S THE MOUNTAIN. "C'MON," I HEA
RD MYSELF SAY, AND WE PLUNGE
D DOWN SHIRTLESS, OUR ARMS S
PREAD AGAINST THE ONCOMING
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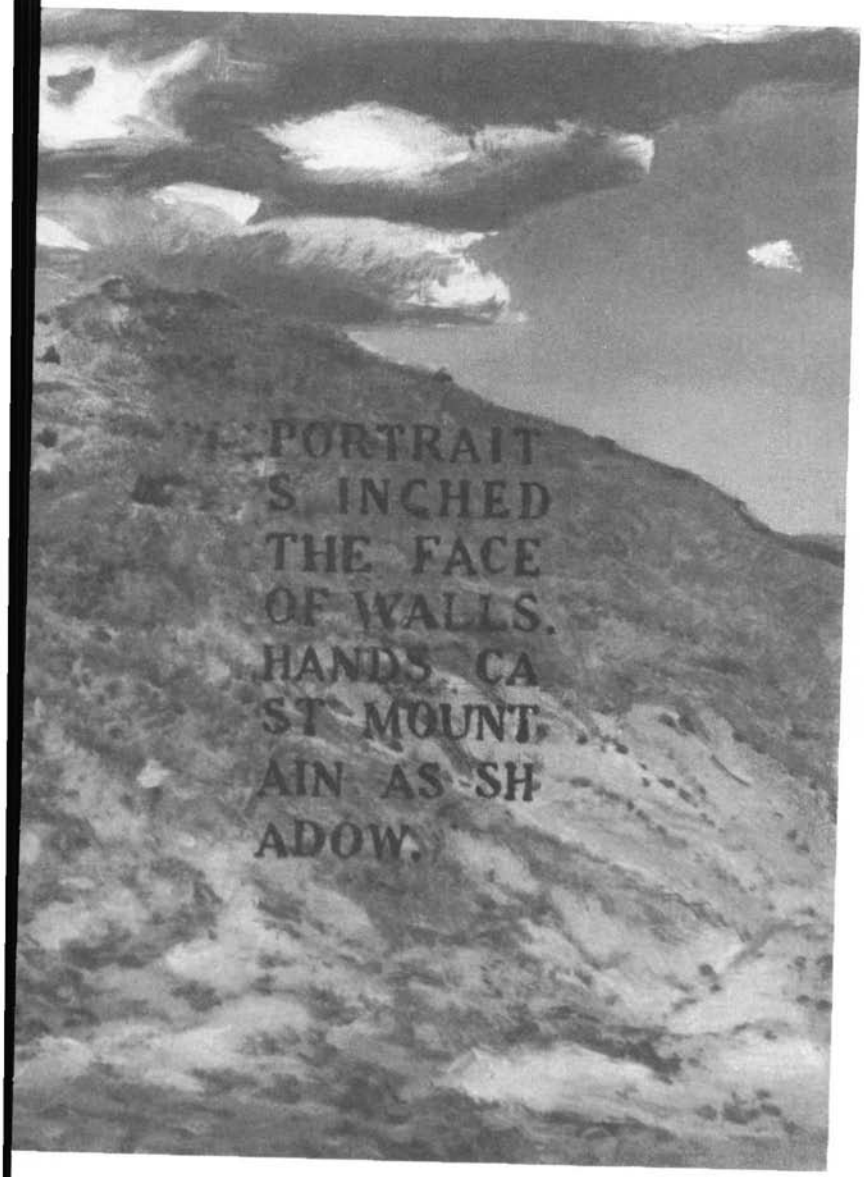

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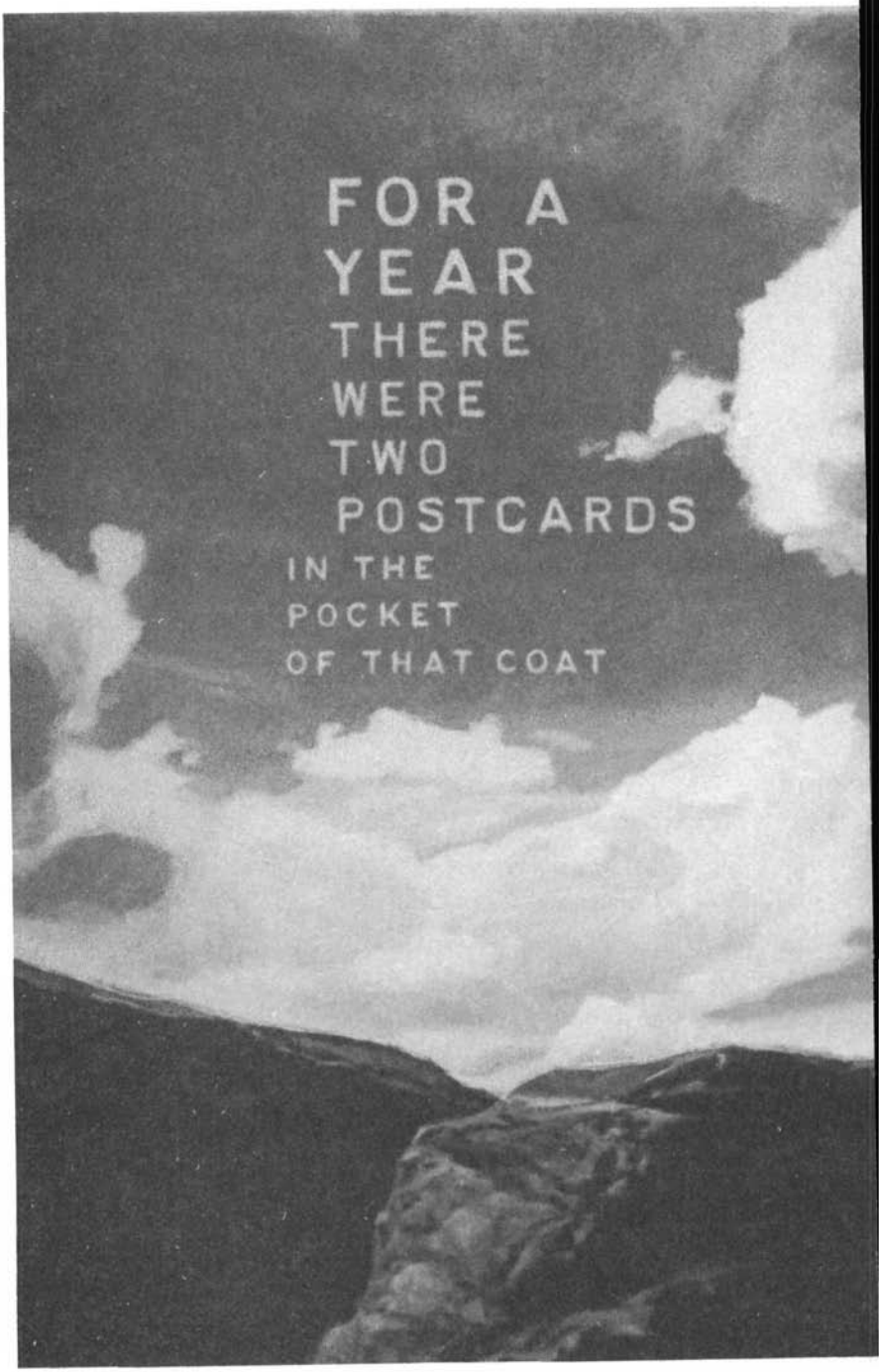

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The Sick Man of Europe

Geoffrey Wolff

The Making of *Little Mary Sunshine*

It would be neat to claim I played Billy Jester, but in fact I was just a forest ranger, Hank, in the chorus, Jester's sidekick. I brought to my part a decent baritone voice and peppy want-to. This was the spring musical at Robert College, merry *Little Mary Sunshine.* A cynic might have called the wholesome confection campy, if camp had been invented in 1963. How did it go? Finishing school maidens got sort of lost in the woods, among injuns, and the forest rangers sort of calmed them and this led to low-key lovey-dovey. Sweet was the ruling principle. In a note to his libretto, Rick Besoyan warned would-be directors, "It is absolutely essential to the success of the musical that it should be played with the most warmhearted earnestness." A YOUNG LADY delivers the prologue: "Hello: I'd like to take you back to a time when the world was much more simple than ours is

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today. For instance, good meant good, bad meant bad, virtue was all . . ."

I had only one line: during a bit of business with a camera on a tripod, I was to instruct the hoop-skirted maidens to say cheese. This evening was a closed dress rehearsal; my stutter was wrestling the little speech to a draw—*s-s-s-s-s-s-ay chuh-chuh-chuh-chuh-Camembert*—when I became aware of a figure coming forward out of the darkness at the back of the auditorium. The maidens were trilling a little tune, tra-la, and then their song trailed off, and I squinted into the gloom.

"You've been fucking my wife!" The fellow waved a side arm, a Webley service revolver, with its thong around his wrist. "You've been fucking my wife!" I dove to the stage. So did the wife in question. So did another forest ranger. And another. As many rangers as acted and sang in *Little Mary Sunshine* dropped like tenpins to the stage. A shot rang, as they say in stage directions, out. Before I was shot dead in Istanbul my life flashed, as they show in movies, before my eyes.

The Socratic Method

Less than two years before, I was graduated from Princeton with a degree in English and a high degree of certainty in my high seriousness as a scholar and pedagogue. I came to Byzantium for exotic novelty and to teach. I could say I had chosen a calling as a teacher to evade the draft, but this would tell only the least portion of the truth. In fact I saw myself as a missionary, crusading to Asia Minor to light a row of candles, the great works of western letters agreeable to the New Critics, whose apt and ardent student I was. (When I got word of my job at Robert College, where my Princeton advisor Richard Blackmur had lectured, I naturally sought advice. "Do not on any account have sexual congress with

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a Turkish melon," Blackmur advised. "It puts the foreskin in jeopardy.")

Robert College, eight miles from Istanbul and built into the ramparts of Bebek, overlooking Asia and the Bosporus, founded in 1863 by Cyrus Hamlin, an American missionary who had washed clothes for Florence Nightingale's hospital in Üsküdar, was the oldest American educational institution abroad. (*Was* because in 1971 it was returned to xenophobic Turks and renamed Boğaziçi Üniversitesi.) Instruction was in English, and most of the students were cosmopolitan Turks, together with students from ethnic minorities—Jews, Greeks and Armenians—whose parents cherished the visible sign of wealth and social position conferred by a degree from Robert College. During my first year I was to teach in Robert Academy, a boys' secondary school on the campus of the college. Several of my colleagues were young, and a disproportionate number had been undergraduates at Princeton, where the headmaster of Robert Academy had studied. By an odd juxtaposition of circumstance, my father had lived and worked in Istanbul in the late 1940s, when I was living with my mother and brother in Florida, not quite a teen, easily impressed by the ceremonial sword, Turkish harem slippers and fez he sent home at Christmas.

For romance, mystery, murky light, spiced and sour scents, novelty, menace, relentless beauty—nothing has compared. I fell in love, and falling in love with Istanbul was like falling in love with a whore, and in Istanbul I did that too. The city was decadent and worn; to Istanbul, everything had happened. Among its violent tourists had been Arabs, Huns, Tartars, Goths, Vlachs, Crusaders.

We crusaders on the faculty lived scattered around a hill (which I learned to call The Hill) in college housing, some grand indeed, Victorian houses with huge living rooms and formal gardens; my apartment had an unobstructed view of the Bosporus, and my first night in Tur-

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key I was kept awake by ferries whistling as they steamed from the Golden Horn to the Black Sea, and by nightingales singing in the umbrella pines and cedars outside my window.

A couple of days after flying from New York to Turkey, the morning after the first in an exhausting succession of faculty parties uncompromising in their voluptuary and rakehell excess, I sat in the study of the highest academic officer of Robert College; I had been summoned to be welcomed to my first regular job, the calling for which my training and ambition had prepared me. The sturdy Protestant precepts of the college were given piquant expression by the drink I was offered, *çay,* tea served in a little hourglass shot glass. I felt abstracted: the long flight to an exotic setting, last evening's bender, this morning's awful hangover. The dean made a steeple with his fingers; he cleared his throat; he looked directly at me; he sniffed the air; he cleared his throat again. We sat. He gestured toward the tea. I shook my head. We sat.

I said, "Sir, I'm glad to be at Robert College."

"Well," he said. "Well. This is the way of it: what you drink, how much, with whom—that is your business. What you teach, your opinions in the classroom—your department. Whether you teach, whether or not you appear at the appointed hour and in the appointed classroom—my department. Very. My bailiwick. Sexual preferences and energy—your affair. Sexual congress with students—mine. . . ." I cleared my throat now because, hang on just a New York minute here, my students were going to be men. Boys! Better to curse the darkness! The dean welcoming me to my first teaching job was still speaking. ". . . And if I sack you, and believe you me I'd have no hesitation to sack you, there's no place beneath this place to which to fall. From this depth. Don't test the truth of my edict; welcome to Robert College."

If I got an odd greeting, it was no odder than the education I imposed on my students, who ran in age from

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sixteen to twenty. I was warned that many among them were cunning and rowdy, that they'd cheat me blind, that they'd hunt for the chink in my armor and exploit it mercilessly. In short, except for the cheating part, that they were schoolboys after my own heart. I heard horror stories about a teacher who had been laughed out of the country, about another who had pushed a wiseguy out a second-story window. The boys didn't trouble me; I was indifferent to my students' esteem, and they seemed to like this. I found them tame as pups, and I taught them whatever tricks I wished to teach them. May Allah be my witness, I press-ganged those young Turks into the ranks of the New Criticism.

During the three years they were our students, the boys were subjected to a course in literature that went from *Job, Book of* to *Jarrell, Randall.* We used a three-volume anthology of world literature, condensed as to contents and to typography, densely printed on tissue paper. From this horn of plenty we assigned what whim or dogma dictated. Each year's class numbered more or less a hundred boys, and early every week the class would gather to be lectured by one of us: my colleague David Leeming was Professor Mythology: he lectured on the Greeks and Icelandics. Charlie Klopp had spent a summer in Perugia: he did Dante and Machiavelli. I gave the guys the latest on Pope, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* Arnold, Yeats, Eliot and Stevens. I've got some of my lecture notes before me, but candor has its bounds. Let me say this: there are a quantity of Turkish engineers broadcasting among their Near Eastern friends odd and insubstantial notions about what William Empson remarked to I.A. Richards about John Donne's conceits.

Using the lectures as points of reference, we met later each week in small discussion groups; in my discussion group all listened to one discuss, and the one was me, which was probably why I got along well with my students, who could never get in a word edgewise; since I

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never gave them cause or opportunity to speak, how could I have known if they were contemptuous or insolent?

In discussion groups I'd ask Hasan Günzel: "What thread connects Goldsmith's 'Comparison Between Sentimental and Laughing Comedy' with Schiller's 'On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry'?" Hasan, a deer caught by a jacklight, would stare at me. "Very good," I'd say. "Capital! I know what you're thinking, and agree entirely! Art in its highest form requires a certain . . . how should I phrase this, Seyit? How indeed, you may rejoin; well, let me venture, Halil, a certain . . . *expansiveness* of fancy. Just so!" I was a china shop in a bull corral.

Payday

I got less than two thousand a year, but in the early 1960s that was enough to finance winter, spring and summer holidays in Western Europe. In addition to my apartment and good meals in a faculty dining room, I also got an allowance in Turkish lira meant to cover incidentals and the odd restaurant meal. It was the custom among the faculty to take this money, paid in cash the first Friday of every month, downtown. I say it was the custom of "the faculty"—I should amend this: the dissolute cohort to which I belonged comprised no more than ninety-seven percent of the American and English males teaching at Robert Academy and Robert College. Two percent were recluses and moral refugees hiding from the world, the law or themselves; perhaps as many as one percent were virtuous and moderate.

We'd gather in small groups at the bottom of The Hill, along the edge of the Bosporus near the castle Rumeli Hisari, at a *dolmuş* stop. *Dolmuş* means "stuffed," and these jitneys, big old florid, tail-finned De Sotos and Hudsons, were overburdened with passengers picked up

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from stops along the route from the Black Sea to Taksim Square, the center of Istanbul's new quarter. The fare was cheap, the ride raucous with syrupy Turkish love music sung in a whining falsetto, played at distorting volume on portable 45-rpm phonographs by the drivers, who competed with one another for the flagrant flash of their overdecorated and overequipped pink and chartreuse taxis, for their audacity at the wheel, for their fighter-pilot ice-water nerves, for the excessive droop of their moustaches.

First stop was the Park Hotel, where my father had lived. From the hilltop of Pera the terrace had a commanding view of onion domes and minarets needling the smoky blue air and of Seraglio Point down in the Golden Horn and in all directions of water busy with shipping. The Park was favored by western residents and spies, which is a redundancy because all western residents, not excluding clergy and certainly not excluding teachers, were assumed to be spies. That I was not a spy was a discouraging index of the low degree of trust invested in me by the deans at Princeton, who routinely recommended foreign-bound graduates to the CIA. At the Park my friends and I would prime the pump with raki, a licorice-based clear liquor, kin to pernod and anise and ouzo, mixed with ice and water which turns it buttermilk yellow. Here we'd watch the sun set over the city, and hear amplified an inspired whine, a muezzin's call to prayers.

Next was a manageable walk to Taksim Square and along Cumhuriyet Caddesi to the Divan Oteli, where I might have my hair cut, beard trimmed, shoes shined. The Divan was small and luxurious in a less-is-more manner. Its small bar was favored by the wealthy and amiable Turkish intelligentsia, newspaper editors, bankers, importers, publishers, and cosmopolitan layabouts educated at one of two English universities. I've never seen cigarettes smoked with such enthusiasm as they were smoked by Turks in that bar: the men's fingers were bright or-

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ange from tar, and the jokes and gossip in French and German and English were delivered hoarse-voiced, with hacking laughter.

I remember my first visit here: Adnan Menderes, the increasingly despotic president who had been arrested several months earlier, was about to be hanged. Press censorship was tight, but the barflies at the Divan spoke freely about Menderes's coming execution, how excited he must be, how thrilled really, how he'd been practicing for years by hanging himself with a silk stocking. I confessed bewilderment; the bartender regarded me with astonishment: did I mean to leave the impression I had never hanged myself just a little? Not even for fun?

More raki here, unless a Turk at the bar with a son studying at Robert College decided to buy a round of Johnnie Walker Red Label for the indigent professors. I liked the Divan because it was the stopover for flight crews aboard KLM and BEA and SAS. I'd met a couple of stewardesses on the SAS flight that brought me to Istanbul, Finnish sisters who didn't seem to compare notes, unless they did; they'd phone when they came to town, unless they didn't phone because they'd phoned someone else, but that was okay too, because they'd introduced me to other stewardesses, and for me—a survivor of what Richard Pryor has called The Great Pussy Drought of the Fifties—I didn't see how circumstance could have dealt me a better hand. We lived; we lived!

After barbering and sipping, our ragtag gang, less a couple of teachers who'd fallen from the pack for lack of stamina, plus a couple of pals gathered from the terrace of the Park and the bar of the Divan, made its way down crowded, narrow Istiklal Caddesi, noisy and raffish despite the old hospitals and libraries and embassy buildings in use before the capitol moved to Ankara. The street attacked the senses: the art nouveau ironworked balconies were rusting out, and the buildings were falling in on themselves. Stray cats and dogs, thin to the bone, sulked in doorways. In the Ottoman days of empire, this

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main drag was known as the Grand Rue de Pera, and branching off it were alleys with fanciful names: Street of the Gate of the Thumb, and Street of the Pine-Gum Tree. Along the way we'd stop for refreshments at the café attached to an art cinema, where Bohemian intellectuals—painters and poets and movie directors and actors, dressed a hundred percent in black—drank black coffee. We Americans seemed always welcome in Turkey; American books and movies and clothes and cars and money and slang engaged the hip, and our mastery of nuclear fission engaged the warlike working-class Turks. Everyone hated the neighboring Soviets, so for that too we were celebrated. An American could grow spoiled in Istanbul.

Our destination was Rejans, also called The Old Russian Restaurant, run by three or four ancient sisters, also dressed invariably in black, upstairs in a rickety wood building near the Fish Market and Galatasaray Square. Rejans had been memorialized in an early variant of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," that soap opera in which Hemingway relentlessly misspelled all Turkish placenames. This was my favorite restaurant in Istanbul, which meant then it was my favorite restaurant anywhere. High-ceilinged, with posters on the grimy walls, the tables set far apart and covered with heavy cloth, there was nothing pretty or delicate about the place. I must have eaten thirty or forty dinners there, and I never had a bad time at Rejans. I invariably ate the same things: borscht, cold fish with mayonnaise, beef Stroganoff and—when they were in season—strawberries Chantilly. I don't order any of these dishes anymore, because Rejans, like the Turks, spoiled me. The Russian sisters made their own vodka. The state kept a monopoly on cigarettes and alcohol and while the wine was excellent, and the beer was excellent, and the raki was raki, Turkish vodka was awful, awful, awful. We all made our own from 180-proof grain alcohol. This we'd boil and strain and dilute,

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according to various home recipes, bringing it down to fifty or sixty proof, making it barely suitable for mixing with juice or tonic. The sisters at Rejans, working with the same raw material, worked alchemy; they served their vodka chilled and straight in silver thimbles, and none smoother anywhere ever, with a hint of the Seville oranges they were rumored to grow for no reason other than to impart to their vodka a hint of Seville orange.

Well, now it was time to have some fun, drink a drink. For this we went to the Flower Passage, the courtyard of a building built to billet the Janissaries, elite troops of the sultans during the time of the Ottoman Empire. We meandered among fruit stands equipped with polished brass scales and fastidious arrangements of brass weights, found our way to a gallery of beer stalls where we sat at slate tables on high stools backed with cane, their seats worn smooth by the rub of workingmen's corduroy and whipcord. Or we stood beneath struggling black fan blades, at tables of common wood so many times varnished that the grain had disappeared beneath the shellac's dark luster. The table was pleasing to lean against, almost soft. Here we drank draft ale or dark beer in a quantity known as an Argentine, sometimes smoothed with a shot of vodka, often—too often—taken with a raki chaser. The breweries had been designed and built by the Germans during World War I to supply the kaiser's Janissaries with Bavarian pilsner, and to hell with the Germans, but they did know how to build a brewery that could make a beer a thirsty schoolteacher was happy to drink. We'd drink the beer in iced glasses as capacious as flower vases, and at each table fresh flowers were arranged in heavy beer mugs. We'd continue to eat almonds and little meat balls and skewered spiced mutton grilled on charcoal braziers set within reach outside the big open windows, stuffed mussels and prawns from the fish market next door; the beer stalls were for the pleasure of the workers who stocked and serviced the fish and

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flower markets. Customers wore no neckties and their shirts buttoned all the way up; the beer stalls were raucous with the static and hysteria of a radio broadcast of a football match. Inside were fights, brief but fierce. Outside, men strolled like baby brothers hand in hand, itinerant musicians played little steam calliopes, jugglers juggled, acrobats walked on their hands, magicians attempted tricks with transparent clumsiness that we nevertheless applauded; vendors sold lottery tickets and curiosities. I bought a plastic windmill and a helium balloon in the rough likeness of a cat. (I could have selected from the peddler's bouquet a mouse to go with it.) Craftsmen offered novel services: I wear an honored and ancient family ring, almost two generations old, and one raucous Friday night in the Flower Passage, having bought all the flowers I needed, I paid to have a prophecy or a dirty joke or a cartoon or some damned thing engraved in miniature on the inside of my ring, by a man who sold that kind of service late at night in such places; I'd tell what the message says, but Turkish meals puffed up me (and my ring finger), and the family jewelry is now in place forever, or until ring and finger are repossessed by the jeweler who cashed my father's chimerical check.

After the Flower Passage, our paths divided. Some of my friends went to the Turkish baths, which were not necessarily in business to serve men looking for what some of my friends sought, but which were also not in business to deny what some of my friends sought. For "some of my friends" read fifty percent, about. Robert College was a haven for or, depending on one's vantage point, a nest of homosexuals. At about the time these friends would grow restless, and declare an intention to "round up some *boeuf,*" I'd grow restless and declare my intention to go to the nightclubs.

There was a red-light district near the Flower Market, and I knew how to find my way to it, but my students patronized the whorehouses and reluctantly I had

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found the inner dignity to honor the bedrock decorum of my vocation; I had decreed the whores off limits to Meester Wolff. Bar girls were a different breed, of course, and I'd take my balloon cat and plastic windmill down an alley (Street of the Slave's Son) off Istiklal Caddesi to a hole in the wall lit fancifully by neon: Meksim or—my favorite—Fooles Bercer (pronounce the *c* as a soft *g,* as in *Bergere*). The Istanbul Follies employed an entertainer, Veilah, and I loved her. She entertained me by letting me tell her how much and in what ways I loved her, and by telling me she loved me too, and by encouraging me to celebrate our abiding love with Turkish pink champagne. Veilah would promise to meet me after closing on a street corner to which she directed me with elaborate maps drawn on the backs of napkins. She spoke bar English and I spoke bar Turkish. We must have lost our way in the translation, because I'd stand on the slick cobbles of a street corner from 4 A.M. till dawn, smelling piss seep through the gutters, my heart beating passionately, and then it would be breakfast time and Veilah would still be searching the city for me, without luck. (You can't know what I was up against learning to speak her language; the first phrase book I bought taught me this: if I could just manage to say *sizden bir ricam var,* I would have conveyed to my darling *I have a request to do you* or, as the language text renders it phonetically, *ay hev a rikuest to du yu.* On the other hand, I might say *yüzümü kestiniz, kaniyor* and Veilah would understand me to have remarked, *you have cut my visage, it is bleeding;* on the contrary Veilah would retort, *hayir, bay, bir sivilce idi, onu: no, I have not cut your visage, there was only a pimple and I have taken it away* [*no, ay hev nat cat yur vizeyç, der uaz onli e pimpil end ay hev teykin it evuey*].) I had seen *The Blue Angel,* and as drunk as I was, I never didn't remember that Emil Jannings was a schoolteacher. But I wasn't a Foole at the Bercer because, as

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nearly as I can recall, I never crowed like a rooster, or not in public I didn't. It is true that according to literal interpretation of the aphorism, I might have been mistaken for a Foole, inasmuch as me and my money were soon parted.

Hill Cocktails

We went to parties. Typically these were thrown on a week's notice in a young married couple's hillside house. The drink of choice, the Hill Cocktail, was served from a punch bowl and chilled by a block of ice. This was homemade vodka, orange juice and Turkish brandy. It was seductively smooth; that is, it did the devil's work quietly, but by golly it did it.

Let's say there were fifty at the party, twenty or so of them Turks from Istanbul's lively theater community (which had been inspired by a few members of the humanities faculty at Robert College, especially a flamboyantly homosexual Englishman, Hilary Sumner-Boyd, who carried with him rumors of exile from home in the wake of great Oscar Wildean scandal). There would be a few teachers from the American College for Girls, our sister institution in Arnavutköy. The party would begin after dinner, build in jollity and veer toward wanton goatishness or mercurial rancor; sometimes the shouting matches were inspired by the warning signs of adultery (a husband finding his wife in the bathtub without water but brimming with his best friend), but some of the explosions were sparked by disagreements as to aesthetics. During a spring garden party a Robert College dean, a sturdy fellow with a porcupine crew cut, insisted on reading aloud his poems in praise of Byzantium; these were singsong rhymed couplets; one pair married *feather* with *heather,* making a near-rhyme with *wherever* and *forever.* When he finished, the dean was weeping great salt

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tears. Hilary Sumner-Boyd, who had stood listening with his eyes shut, which could have implied ecstatic transportation or simple blackout, stirred:

"Oh dear," he said.

"You like my lines," said the dean.

"Oh dear no," said Hilary. "They are odious verses."

"You faggot asshole," argued the dean, who was a marine veteran of a foreign war. "I've killed Japs on beaches. You wouldn't know a sincere poem if it sucked your cock."

"How exactly," asked Hilary, "would that work? If I'd only known poetry could be so *useful,* my dear . . . why do you tell me only *now?*"

The dean disappeared. The dean reappeared with a bayonet, which he stabbed with appropriate exclamations into the tree against which Hilary leaned. Hilary snickered; he said to the dean: "How curious: you are a coward." The poet/dean wept.

Jimmy Baldwin came to live among us. He was trying to finish *Another Country,* and a Turkish theater director he had met in London offered the serenity of a room to live and write facing the Bosporus, a place where Baldwin wouldn't have to decide (for a change) whether he was principally a black activist or principally a writer. The first night I met Jimmy he picked a fight with me. The first night Jimmy met anyone, he picked a fight. I don't recall the details of my quarrel, but from observing later bouts with others, I'm sure it went like this: I would have heard him railing against "The Man" or "Mister Charlie," and I would have tuned my ears. Jimmy would deliver a diatribe, a fierce preacherly polemic against white America. Then, with the Colonel Blimpery of a colonizer or missionary far from the imperial heartland, I'd have protested some excess of rhetoric. I might have said that I wasn't sure I could agree that all white Americans, first to last, were bloodier

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than Hitler because Hitler at least had acted from passionate belief rather than standing by, smug and indifferent. I must have disagreed with something he declaimed, because I do recollect with perfect acuity Jimmy's astonishingly soft eyes bugging out at me, his huge mouth twisting into a sardonic grin I might have mistaken for a sneer, a grin I knew later to have been provoked by the delicious prospect of an argument. How that man relished argument! He would dissent with anything: the excellence of Henry James's sentences (he loved them, unless you loved them), how to cook vegetables. He was a very Jesuit in debate. He talked fast and in complete sentences; his voice would grow louder and more emphatic until Jimmy's opinion climaxed with a shrewd stare. Then he would theatrically lower his voice and—one or the other—laugh or cut you dead. If you had mentioned your dear Aunt Em, who considered her negro maid almost a member of the family, Jimmy would consign you eternally to hell, and good for him. If he laughed, it meant not that he wasn't serious about white guilt, white shame, white lovelessness; if he laughed his ungoverned, musical laugh it meant that the argument would continue, forever, if he had his way. Meantime it was now recess, let's pour another drink and put Bessie Smith on the phonograph.

Jimmy liked Istanbul. It was a peculiarity of the Turks that they believed black people to bring good luck. This friendly prejudice may have been a payoff from the favored status of Nubian slaves among the Ottoman sultans' palace households. Whatever, Jimmy was free to kick back in Turkey, and he soon rented what had been a pasha's library, built above the towers and ramparts and crenellations of Rumeli Hisari. During the years he lived in Istanbul, years during which he wrote *The Fire Next Time,* and visited home to witness Birmingham and the March on Washington, I'm not certain Jimmy knew or cared whether Turkey was ruled by a parliament or a

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pope or a king or a queen. He very well knew that the doorman at the Divan Oteli was a black man, and in Istanbul a personage, and if this combination of qualities troubled Jimmy, he and trouble were off duty.

At the tail end of parties there'd be a great pairing-off, or there'd be a Great Idea. Under the rubric Great Idea, maybe I'd persuade a teacher from the Girl's College to ride on the back of my fast, noisy English motorcycle out to the Black Sea beach at Kilyos where we would, conflating a Great Idea with a Great Pairing-Off, swim naked at sunrise. I spent the dawn after my first Hill party, which would have been my first dawn in Turkey, undertaking to swim the Bosporus with a Brooklyn-born Irish-American mathematics teacher, a gravedigger's son with a doctorate in experimental physics, courtesy of the GI Bill. John Freely knew Istanbul, particularly the Stamboul of mosques and Byzantine churches, better than any westerner. He wrote the authoritative *Blue Guide: Istanbul,* but dog-paddling across the full tidal bore of the Bosporus that night, egging me on with cries—Byron had fronted the Hellespont, how could I do less?—he neglected to guide me away from orange peels and fish heads; seeing a Greek freighter steaming south toward the Sea of Marmara, on a collision course with my unhappy, bobbing self, I made for shore. Freely said the trouble with me was I always left the party before it really began. Since we'd known each other only since nine that night, I was determined to prove Freely a poor prophet, and I did. Who was it after all who drove with him and Bill Hickman across the border of Turkey into the no-man's-land of the Bulgarian frontier, bristling with mines and machine gunners? We'd decided to spend the weekend in Vienna, storm the goddamned gates successfully this time, to make up for Süleyman the Magnificent's miserable failure in 1529 to take that city. We had neither visas nor money, and Vienna was far, far away. The Bulgarian frontier police returned us to Thrace, drop-

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ping us across the border as though they held us with long tongs, and we were turds being dropped into trash. They claimed we were drunk. What could we say?

John Freely said, "Consider Sultan Selim the Sot. He'd have a drink now and then. Behold his works!"

"He drowned in his bath," Bill Hickman said.

The Sick Man of Europe

That's what they called Turkey, and if Turkey wasn't, I was. I was in the infirmary. My relationship with the Robert College infirmary got off to a poor start when I put three Princeton friends in a sick ward with some students after a night at the Park, Divan, Rejans, Flower Market and Fooles Bercer. I guess I'd misplaced my key to the infirmary, or maybe I'd never had one, so my pals had had to check into their room by way of a locked window. Then, as their dinner wore off, one of them sensed a wolf in his stomach and decided he needed a snack. He opened the refrigerator; he'd misplaced *his* key to the lock on the refrigerator door, so he had to pick the latch with a crowbar. Then he ate a loaf of bread and a beefsteak and a dozen eggs. How could you eat a dozen eggs? I'd asked him. "I just scrambled them up with cream and butter," he said.

Since then I'd been to the infirmary for a jumbo shot of penicillin (before I forswore the red-light district), administered by the Robert College doctor, a Turk so fastidious in his attitude toward the human body that he conducted his examination of my sorry condition while I remained fully dressed, with a sheet draped over my zipped trousers. His investigation of my symptoms was entirely anecdotal, and entirely conclusive, both that time and the next time, about four days after my beloved Veilah found me after all at the street corner to which she had sent me, because, taking a leaf from the spy's instruction manual, I had torn in half and kept one half of the

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very bank note that would be her bank note if she found me.

Now I was in the infirmary being treated for alcoholic poisoning. While I was there, the headmaster of Robert Academy paid me a visit.

"Have you ever heard of Dorian Gray?" the headmaster asked.

"You mean Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray?"

"That Dorian Gray."

I said I guessed I had heard of him, saying this with the wariness a fellow might use if he'd been accused of plagiarizing *Moby-Dick* when in fact he hadn't read *Moby-Dick.* I mean, which was the greater offense? Larceny or ignorance?

The married headmaster said if I hadn't read Dorian Gray, I should. I might want to acquaint myself with *The Rake's Progress.* With the picaresque in general, with *Gil Blas,* perhaps. And how about Boccaccio's *Decameron?* And also *Under the Volcano.* And by the way, I had been put off limits, cast from Eden as it were, by all single female teachers at the American College for Girls.

"Would that include wives, sir?"

The Unmaking of *Little Mary Sunshine*

As the gunshots rang out, as I chewed the scenery down there on the stage, I was surrounded by wives. All the forest rangers, mostly bachelors, were surrounded by wives. It had been a merry production. There was no changing room; it was spring; the high spirits backstage had been infectious (but not, thank heavens, as infectious as Veilah). Given the facts, it was impossible to divine who was the subject of the sentence "You've been fucking my wife!" In fact, it wouldn't have been possible to know the object, had not her husband made himself visible in the rim of the floodlights.

He was British, which accounted for Her Majesty's

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Webley with the thong. He fired again. There was silence, what I would have to call an uncomfortable silence. It was broken by a sibilant English schoolgirl's soprano, the very voice whose music had enraptured us these long days and nights of rehearsal: "If I wasn't a virgin when we were married, I'm most surely a virgin now!"

"How would that work?" whispered the fellow playing the part of Chief Brown Bear, cowering beside me.

She called out again: "You go home you silly boy! And don't come back till you're all grown up, till you've learned to behave yourself!"

Well Amen to that.

All Grown Up

I returned to Istanbul three years later with my wife. We stayed with Jimmy Baldwin and David Leeming in the pasha's library. The city was a shock to Priscilla; there's a gorgeous Thelonious Monk piece titled "Ugly Beauty," and for Priscilla Istanbul was like that. The Turks are ugly to animals, for example, and our first afternoon in the Old City, she had to watch a beastly man beat his donkey nearly to death. And it wasn't beautiful to watch *hamals,* human pack animals, bear refrigerators on their backs.

Priscilla was surely bewildered, maybe shocked. It was not only that she was young, and a Yankee, and six years earlier a Miss Porter's girl with a perhaps distorted understanding of what constituted sin. She was also newly married to someone she had been warned not to marry. Her defiance of those warnings had been built on her confidence that she knew me even better than I knew me. Now she wasn't so sanguine. Standing on the ramparts of Topkapi Palace with my friends, looking out toward the Column of the Goths and beyond to Seraglio Point, she heard what I believed to be charming stories of by-

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gone human folly: wars, and religious persecutions, and devious eunuchs, and a sultan's wife who had her husband's grand *vezir* strangled by mutes, who had likewise poisoned her son. It was difficult to articulate how I could take pleasure from such Adamic history, why I'd wanted to do graduate work in depravity, why the stink of offal in the streets made me feel alive rather than ill. When I'd left Istanbul for the land west of Vienna, John Freely had warned me: "Terrible things will happen to you there. You will grow old. And serious. You will be crushed by falling canned goods in the supermarket. Your wife will join a book club. And I my friend will be thigh-deep in wine in the Sea of Marmara, or receiving admiring glances at the Divan, where I will drink with shrimp stains on my tropical suit."

A few days into our visit, Priscilla became one of us. It was difficult to locate the place and moment. Perhaps it was at a late afternoon party given by an infamously self-indulgent great-grandson of a sultan at his sway-backed, unpainted Palladian wood palace on the Asian shore of the Bosporus, just at the junction of the Sweetwaters of Asia. Emin Bey kept peacocks in his garden, and while they cooed and clucked we listened to him tell in his soft sinister Oxford-Constantinople accent about the palace across the Sweetwaters, with its facade removed one foggy spring night by a Soviet freighter. No one had repaired it, Emin Bey said. Why? He shrugged. There was the question of cost, of course. And liability. But really, it was possible, in Istanbul, to become used to anything. No?

Yes. That night Priscilla and I ate with old friends at a Bebek restaurant built out over the Bosporus. Along the shore bright blue fishing nets were stretched to dry. Priscilla saw rotten fruit floating in the black water among fish heads. But after stuffed grape leaves and cheese-filled pastries and pieces of lamb dipped in cold yogurt, Priscilla ate the fish whose heads now fed other fish. It was delicious *lufer,* bluefish, and while we ate we

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watched fishermen catching more, all anyone could want, from saffron and India red double-ended rowboats lit by kerosene lamps. Now, at slack of tide, the boats converged from up and down the Bosporus, from the ruined palaces of Asia and from the Black Sea and from the Golden Horn. Then I persuaded Priscilla she had heard a nightingale, and that she smelled Judas blossoms, even though they were past their season, and so what if they were? Imagine.

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Donald Hall

The Third Inning

1. Alexander, first over the wall,
collapsed battered by stones. Instantly
the Macedonian companions
gathered their shields over his body
and these athletes of honor and brawn
withstood repeated iron assault—
to defend, to survive, to triumph.
When the King's wound healed, he divided
the known world among his companions.

2. At the center of a baseball is
five pounds of cat intestines, pressured
into a tiny marble-sized sphere.
While I write "Baseball," Ada the cat
rubs at my ankles to inform me
that nothing whatever bothers her.
Jennifer and I make love at night;
afterwards, something good continues,
as if the radio, turned on low at

3. three A.M., told about a baseball
game all night long in Japanese or
Spanish, with the crowd noises intact.
The next morning, as Jennifer stands
at the kitchen sink staring out the
window, I gaze measuring her ass.
Then she squeezes an orange: Its bright
gelatinous membranes rupture to
fill her blue cup with sunny ichor.

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4. The ship made twenty-five knots into
a fifty-knot wind over hot Gulf
water. I climbed to the topmost deck,
tilting my weight into the hot wind,
poising my heavy body into
the wind's weight, pulling myself along
rails with both hands to push against wind
that scudded black clouds into blackness
with the moon down and few stars showing.

5. Wind flattened my beard and my nostrils.
Wind gathered my shout and shuffled it.
All night the kitten walked back and forth
on our bodies biting and poking.
Meantime the old cat sniffed, hissed, and sighed
to lifelist many disloyalties;
as when the Dodgers left Ebbets Field.
It is ecstasy beyond pleasure
to watch Jennifer squeeze orange juice.

6. So the new dog's pet is the kitten.
All day she hurls herself at his huge
muzzle, bigger than she is, her mouth
wide open and her claws stretched. He snaps
without biting, love-bites; she pauses
in her fury to lick his jaws clean.
Then she hides—to leap from her secret
place onto the great boa of his
wagging magnificent golden tail.

7. All winter now aged ballplayers
rehearse their young manhood, running and
throwing under Florida's sunshine,
but remain old. In my sixtieth
year I wake fretting over some new
failure. Meeting an old friend's new wife,
I panicked and was rude. Or I ache
mildly feeling some careless anger
with my son I cannot turn away.

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8. The bodies of major league baseball
players are young. We age past the field
so quickly; we diminish, watching
over decades, applauding the young
who come and go. The old cat hisses
at the kitten and pokes the new dog.
Her life is ruined and she will sink
bitter into death. At night she purrs
briefly, lying restored on our bed.

9. The leg is the dancer and the mouth
the sculptor. The tongue models vowels
or chisels consonants. Pause, pitch, pace,
and volume patina a surface
of smooth shapes the mouth closes over.
Behind our listening lips, working
the throat's silent machine, one muscle
shuts on/off/on/off: the motionless
foot and thigh of the word's world-leaper.

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now as ex-lover, recounts how he
had loved unattainable contours
and the imagined, created soul
in her perfect body for thirty
years and at his vigil's end possessed
a handsome fifty year old woman.

5/9

4. The ship made twenty-five knots into
a fifty-knot wind over hot Gulf
water. I climbed to the topmost deck,
tilting my weight into ~~a hot~~ steamy wind,
~~poising~~ and poised my heavy body astride
the wind's weight, pulling myself along
rails with both hands to push against wind
that scudded black clouds into blackness
with the moon down and few stars showing.

5. ~~The~~ Wind flattened my beard and ~~nostrils~~ way
~~The~~ Wind gathered my shout and ~~snuffed~~ it.
~~The Wind~~ ~~desert soon from mountain top.~~
~~The Wind was seven hundred tigers.~~
All night the kitten walked back and forth
on our bodies biting and poking.
Meantime the old cat sniffed, hissed, and sighed
to lifelist ~~all our~~ many disloyalties;
~~the old cat planned multiple murder~~ other it.

A manuscript page from the poem "Baseball" by Donald Hall. "The Third Inning," an excerpt from that poem, appears in this issue.

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Donald Hall

The Art of Poetry XLIII

Donald Hall was born in New Haven and raised in Hamden, Connecticut, but spent summers, holidays, and school vacations on a farm owned by his maternal grandparents in Wilmot, New Hampshire. He took his bachelor's degree at Harvard, then studied at Oxford for two years, earning the B.Litt. in 1953. After holding fellowships at Stanford and at Harvard, Hall moved to Ann Arbor, where he was professor of English at the University of Michigan for seventeen years.

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His first book of poems, Exiles and Marriages, *published in 1955, was followed by* The Dark Houses *(1958),* A Roof of Tiger Lilies *(1964),* The Alligator Bride: New and Selected Poems *(1969),* The Yellow Room *(1971),* The Town of Hill *(1975),* Kicking the Leaves *(1978),* The Happy Man *(1986),* The One Day *(1988), and* Old and New Poems *(1990).*

He is also the author of several books of prose, some written for students, some for children, some for sports fans. They include biographies of Henry Moore and Dock Ellis, a reminiscence called Remembering Poets *(about Frost, Pound, Thomas and Eliot), and four collections of literary essays:* Goatfoot Milktongue Twinbird *(1978),* To Keep Moving *(1980),* The Weather for Poetry *(1982) and* Poetry and Ambition *(1988). Two of the anthologies he has compiled have become classics:* New Poets of England and America *(with Robert Pack and Louis Simpson) and* Contemporary American Poetry. *Among other honors, he has received the Lamont Poetry Selection Award (for* Exiles and Marriages*) and two Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships (1963, 1972). His children's book,* Ox-Cart Man *(1980), illustrated by Barbara Cooney, won the Caldecott Award. He was the first poetry editor of* The Paris Review, *from 1953 to 1961, as well as the first person to interview a poet for this magazine.*

In 1975, after the death of his grandmother, Hall gave up his tenured professorship at Michigan and moved, with his wife Jane Kenyon, to the old family farm in New Hampshire. Since then has supported himself through free-lance writing. Sixteen years later, he continues to feel that he never made a better decision. It was at Eagle Pond Farm that the first two sittings of this interview were conducted, in the summers of 1983 and 1988. A third session was held on the stage of the YM-YWHA in New York.

Donald Hall likes to get to work early, and so both interview sessions at the farm began at about 6:00 A.M. Interviewer and interviewee sat in easy chairs with the tape recorder on a coffee table between them.

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INTERVIEWER

I would like to begin by asking how you started. How did you become a writer? What was the first thing that you ever wrote and when?

DONALD HALL

Everything important always begins from something trivial. When I was about twelve I loved horror movies. I used to go down to New Haven from my suburb and watch films like *Frankenstein, The Wolf Man, The Wolf Man Meets Abbott and Costello.* So the boy next door said, "Well, if you like that stuff, you've got to read Edgar Allan Poe." I had never heard of Edgar Allan Poe, but when I read him I fell in love. I wanted to grow up and *be* Edgar Allan Poe. The first poem that I wrote doesn't really *sound* like Poe, but it's morbid enough. Of course I have friends who say it's the best thing I ever did:

Have you ever thought
Of the nearness of death to you?
It reeks through each corner,
It shrieks through the night,
It follows you through the day
Until that moment when,
In monotones loud,
Death calls your name.
Then, then, comes the end of all.

The end of Hall, maybe. That started me writing poems and stories. For a couple of years I wrote them in a desultory fashion because I wasn't sure whether I wanted to be a great actor or a great poet.

Then when I was fourteen I had a conversation at a Boy Scout meeting with a fellow who seemed ancient to me; he was sixteen. I was bragging and told him that I had written a poem during study hall at high school that day. He asked—I can see him standing there—"You

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write poems?" and I said, "Yes, do you?" and he said, in the most solemn voice imaginable, "It is my profession." He had just quit high school to devote himself to writing poetry full time! I thought that was the coolest thing I'd ever heard. It was like that scene in *Bonnie and Clyde* where Clyde says, "We rob banks." Poetry *is* like robbing banks. It turned out that my friend knew some eighteen-year-old Yale freshmen, sophisticated about literature, and so at the age of fourteen I hung around Yale students who talked about T.S. Eliot. I saved up my allowance and bought the little blue, cloth-covered collected Eliot for two dollars and fifty cents, and I was off. I decided that I would be a poet for the rest of my life, and started by working at poems for an hour or two every day after school. I never stopped.

INTERVIEWER

What about at your high school? I believe you attended Exeter—was anyone there helpful to you?

HALL

After a couple of years of public high school, I went to Exeter—an insane conglomeration of adolescent males in the wilderness, all of whom claimed to hate poetry. There was support from the faculty—I dedicated *A Roof of Tiger Lilies* to one teacher and his wife, Leonard and Mary Stevens—but of course there was also discouragement. One English teacher made it his announced purpose to rid me of the habit of writing poetry. This was in an English Special, for the brightest students, and he spent a fifty minute class reading aloud some poetry I'd handed him, making sarcastic comments. For the first ten minutes, the other students laughed—but then they shut up. They may not have liked poetry but they were shocked by what he did. When I came back to Exeter ten years later to read my poems, after publishing my first book, the other teachers asked my old teacher-enemy to introduce me, and my mind filled up with possibilities for

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revenge. I did nothing, of course, but another ten years after that apparently my unconscious mind did exact its revenge—and because I didn't intend it, I could enjoy revenge without guilt. I wrote an essay for *The New York Times Book Review* which offered a bizarre interpretation of Wordsworth's poem about daffodils. At the end, I said that if anyone felt that my interpretation hurt their enjoyment of the poem, they'd never really admired the poem anyway—but just some picture postcard of Wordsworth's countryside that a teacher handed around in a classroom. When I wrote it, I thought I made the teacher and his classroom up—but a few days after the piece appeared, I received the postcard in an envelope from my enemy-teacher at Exeter together with a note: "I suppose your fingerprints are still on it."

INTERVIEWER

Was there anyone else when you were young who encouraged you to be a writer?

HALL

Not really. My parents were willing to let me follow my nose, do what I wanted to do, and they supported my interest by buying the books that I wanted for birthdays and Christmas, almost always poetry books. When I was sixteen years old I published in some little magazines, and my parents paid for me to go to Bread Loaf.

I remember the first time I saw Robert Frost. It was opening night, and Theodore Morrison, the director, was giving an introductory talk. I felt excited and exalted. Nobody was anywhere near me in age; the next youngest contributor was probably in her mid-twenties. As I was sitting there, I looked out the big French windows and saw Frost approaching. He was coming up a hill, and as he walked toward the windows first his head appeared and then his shoulders, as if he were rising out of the ground. Later, I talked with him a couple of times and I heard him read. He ran the poetry workshop in the

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afternoon on a couple of occasions, though not when my poems were read, thank God; he could be nasty. I sat with him one time on the porch as he talked with two women and me. He delivered his characteristic monologue—witty, sharp, acerb on the subject of his friends. He wasn't hideously unkind, the way he looks in Thomson's biography, but also he was not Mortimer Snerd; he was not the farmer miraculously gifted with rhyme, the way he seemed if you read about him in *Time* or *Life.* He was a sophisticated fellow, you might say.

We played softball. This was in 1945, and Frost was born in 1874, so he was seventy-one years old. He played a vigorous game of softball but he was also something of a spoiled brat. His team had to win, and it was well known that the pitcher should serve Frost a fat pitch. I remember him hitting a double. He fought hard for his team to win, and he was willing to change the rules. He had to win at everything. Including poetry.

INTERVIEWER

What was the last occasion on which you saw him?

HALL

The last time I saw him was in Vermont, within seven or eight months of his death. He visited Ann Arbor that spring and invited me to call on him in the summer. We talked about writing, about literature, though of course mostly he monologued. He was deaf, but even when he was younger he tended to make long speeches. Anyway, after we had been talking for hours, my daughter Philippa, who was three years old, asked him if he had a TV. He looked down at her and smiled and said, "You've seen me on TV?"

Also we talked about a man who was writing a book about Frost, another poet I knew. Frost hadn't read his poetry, and he asked me, "Is he any good?" I told him what I thought. Then, as we were driving away, I looked into the rearview mirror and saw the old man, eighty-

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eight, running after the car—literally running. I stopped and he came up to the window and asked me please, when I saw my friend again, not to mention that Frost had asked me if his poetry was any good, because he didn't want my friend to know that he had not read his poetry. Frost was a political animal in the literary world. So are many of the best poets I run into, and it doesn't seem to hurt their poetry.

INTERVIEWER

Our meeting is an occasion of sorts since you are the original interviewer of poets for *The Paris Review.* Whom did you interview?

HALL

T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore. I had already known Eliot for a number of years. At the time of the interview, he was returning from a winter vacation in someplace like the Bahamas, and we did the interview in New York. He looked tan and lean and wonderful, which surprised me. I had not seen him then for two or three years, and in the meantime he had married Valerie Fletcher. What a change in the man! When I *first* met him, in 1950, he looked like a corpse. He was pale and bent over; he moved stiffly and slowly and coughed a continual, hacking cough. This ancient character was full of kindness and generosity, but he looked ready for the grave, as he did the next several times I saw him. Then, when I met him for the interview after his happy second marriage, he looked twenty years younger. He was happy; he giggled; he held hands with his young wife whenever they were together. Oh, he was an entirely different person, lighter and more forthcoming. Pound I interviewed in the spring of 1960. I was apprehensive, driving to see him in Rome, because I was afraid of what I'd run into. I had loved his poetry from early on, but his politics revolted me, as they did everybody. *The Paris Review* had scheduled an interview with him once before,

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when he was at St. Elizabeth's, but he canceled at the last minute because he determined that *The Paris Review* was part of the "pinko usury fringe." That's the sort of thing I expected, but that's not what I found. He was staying with a friend in Rome, and I drove down from England with my family. After I had knocked on the door and he swung it open and made sure it was me, he said, "Mister Hall, you've come all the way from England—and you find me in fragments!" He spoke with a melody that made him sound like W.C. Fields. There's the famous story—this didn't happen to me but I love it—of a young American poet who was wandering around in Venice, not long before Pound died, and recognized the house where Pound was living with Olga Rudge. Impulsively, he knocked on the door. Maybe he expected the butler to answer, but the door swung open and it was Ezra Pound. In surprise and confusion the young poet said, "How are you, Mr. Pound?" Pound looked at him and, as he swung the door shut, said, "Senile."

The Pound I interviewed in 1960 had not yet entered the silence, but the silence was beginning to enter him. There were enormous pauses in the middle of his sentences, times when he lost his thread; he would begin to answer, then qualify it, then qualify the qualification, as though he were composing a Henry James sentence. Often he could not find his way back out again, and he would be overcome with despair. He had depended all his life on quickness of wit and sharpness of mind. It was his pride. Now he was talking with me for a *Paris Review* interview, which he took seriously indeed, and he found himself almost incapable. Sometimes after ten minutes of pause, fatigue and despair, he would heave a sigh, sit up, and continue the sentence where he had broken it off. He was already depressed, the depression which later deepened and opened that chasm of silence. But then and there, in 1960, I had a wonderful time with him. He was mild, soft, affectionate, sane. One time he and I went

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across the street to have a cup of coffee at a café where I had had coffee earlier. The waiter recognized us both, though he had never before seen us together, and thought he made a connection. He spoke a sentence in Italian which I didn't understand, but the last word was *figlio.* Pound looked at me and looked at the waiter and said, "*Si.*"

INTERVIEWER

In the interview with him, your questions are challenging, yet he seems, not evasive exactly, but as though he just did not quite understand what he had done.

HALL

Oh, no, he never really understood. He insisted that there could be no treason without treasonable intent. I'm certain that he had no treasonable intent, but if treason is giving aid and comfort to the enemy in time of war, well . . . he broadcast from Rome to American troops suggesting that they stop fighting. Of course he thought he was aiding and comforting the real America. He wasn't in touch with contemporary America, not for decades. All the time he was at St. Elizabeth's he was in an asylum for the insane, and his visitors were mostly cranks of the right wing. The news he heard was filtered. I think you can chart his political changes right from the end of the First World War and find that they correlate with the growth of paranoia and monomania that connected economics—finally, Jewish bankers—with a plot to control the world. He started out cranky and moved from cranky to crazy.

INTERVIEWER

In *Remembering Poets,* just as now, the one poet you interviewed that you don't talk about is Marianne Moore.

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HALL

Back then, I thought I didn't have enough to say—or enough that other writers hadn't already said. Lately, I've come up with some notions about her that I may write up for a new edition of that book. I had lunch with her twice in Brooklyn. The first time she took me up the hill to the little Viennese restaurant where she took everybody. Like everybody else I fought with her for the check and lost. She was tiny and frail and modest, but oh so powerful. I think she must have been a weight lifter in another life—or maybe a middle linebacker. Whenever you're in the presence of extreme modesty or diffidence, *always* look for great degrees of reticent power, or a hugely strong ego. Marianne Moore as editor of the *Dial* was made of steel. To wrestle with her over a check was to be pinned to the mat.

Another time when I came to visit, her teeth were being repaired so she made lunch at her apartment. She thought she looked dreadful and wouldn't go outside the house without a complete set of teeth. Lunch was extraordinary! On a tray she placed three tiny paper cups and a plate. One of the cups contained about two teaspoons of V-8 juice. Another had about eight raisins in it, and the other five and a half Spanish peanuts. On the plate was a mound of Fritos, and when she passed them to me she said, "I like Fritos. They're so good for you, you know." She was eating health foods at the time, and I'm quite sure she wasn't being ironic. She entertained some notion that Fritos were a health food. What else did she serve? Half a cupcake for dessert, maybe? She prepared a magnificent small cafeteria for birds.

INTERVIEWER

Marianne Moore went to school and she wrote poetry, but she did not study creative writing in school. Do you think the institution of the creative writing program has helped the cause of poetry?

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HALL

Well, not really, no. I've said some nasty things about these programs. The Creative Writing Industry invites us to use poetry to achieve other ends—a job, a promotion, a bibliography, money, notoriety. I loathe the trivialization of poetry that happens in creative writing classes. Teachers set exercises to stimulate subject matter: "Write a poem about an imaginary landscape with real people in it." "Write about a place your parents lived in before you were born." We have enough terrible poetry around without encouraging more of it. Workshops make workshop-poems. Also, workshops encourage a kind of local competition, being better than the poet who sits next to you—in place of the useful competition of trying to be better than Dante. Also, they encourage a groupishness, an old-boy and -girl network which often endures for decades.

The good thing about workshops is that they provide a place where young poets can gather and argue—the artificial café. We're a big country, without a literary capital. Young poets from different isolated areas all over the country can gather with others of their kind.

And I suppose that workshops have contributed to all the attention that poetry's been getting in the last decades. Newspaper people and essayists always whine about how we don't read poetry the way we used to, in the twenties for example. Bullshit! Just compare the numbers of books of poems sold then and now. Even in the fifties, a book of poems published by some eminent poet was printed in an edition of one thousand hardback copies. If it sold out everyone was cheerful. In 1923 *Harmonium* didn't sell out—Stevens was remaindered, for heaven's sake! A book of poetry today, by a poet who's been around, will be published in an edition of five to seven thousand copies and often reprinted.

But it's not the Creative Writing Industry itself that sells books; it's the poetry readings. Practically nobody

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in the twenties and thirties and forties did readings. Vachel Lindsay, early, then Carl Sandburg, then Robert Frost—nobody else. If you look at biographies of Stevens and Williams and Moore, you see that they read their poems once every two years if they were lucky. Poetry readings started to grow when Dylan Thomas came over in the late forties and fifties. By this time there are three million poetry readings a year in the United States. Oh, no one knows how many there are. Sometimes I think *I* do three million a year.

In the sixties, when the poetry reading boom got going, people went to their state universities and heard poets read. When they went back to their towns, they got the community college to bring poets in, or they set up their own series through an arts group. Readings have proliferated enormously and spread sideways from universities to community colleges, prep schools and arts associations. I used to think, "Well, this is nice while it lasts, but it'll go away." It hasn't gone away. There are more than ever.

INTERVIEWER

We were talking about your *Paris Review* interviews. You also edited poetry for the *Paris Review* for nine years, at the beginning of the magazine. Why did you want to edit?

HALL

At that time I was a fierce advocate of the contemporary, with huge dislikes and admirations, and I wanted to impose my taste. That's why I did the *Advocate* at Harvard, why I did *The Paris Review,* why I did anthologies. When I was at Oxford, besides choosing poetry for *The Paris Review,* I edited a mimeo'd sheet for the Poetry Society, another magazine called *New Poems,* the poetry in the weekly, *Isis,* and *Fantasy Poets*—a pamphlet series which was started by a surrealist painter who did printing on the side. Michael Shanks edited the first four *Fantasy*

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pamphlets—including mine—and when Shanks went down to London, I chose the second bunch, which included Geoffrey Hill and Thom Gunn.

Oxford was a good time—though I felt rather elderly at Oxford. At Harvard I was a year younger than John Ashbery even, but at Oxford I was older than everybody. I'd been through college, while most of them were just out of boarding school. I had fun being dogmatic and bossy. Over at Cambridge, where there hadn't been any poets for years, Thom Gunn turned up writing those wonderful early poems. When we heard him on the BBC, we invited him over to Oxford. My greatest time as an editor was with Geoffrey Hill. Just before the end of my first year at Oxford, he published a poem in *Isis*—a poem he's never reprinted. Meeting him, I asked him casually if he'd submit a manuscript to the *Fantasy* series. Then I came back to the States for the summer; I was here in New Hampshire when Geoffrey's manuscript arrived. I couldn't believe my eyes: "Genesis," "God's Little Mountain," "Holy Thursday." Extraordinary! In the middle of the night I woke up dreaming about it; I turned on the light and read it again.

I accepted the manuscript for the pamphlet series. Later I put "Genesis" in the second issue of *The Paris Review.* Geoffrey was twenty years old.

INTERVIEWER

I believe you were known, for a period in the sixties, as James Dickey's editor or even as his discoverer.

HALL

Oh, I was not his discoverer—but I did publish him early. When I was editing for *The Paris Review* I got poems from an address in Atlanta—long, garrulous poems with good touches. After a while I started writing notes, maybe "sorry" on a printed slip, then "thank you," then a letter saying, "I don't like the middle part." Finally he sent a poem I liked and I took it. We began

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to correspond, and I discovered that he was in advertising. He sent me a fifteen-second radio ad for Coca-Cola, saying, "This is my latest work."

When I was on the poetry board at Wesleyan, he sent us a book, I think at Robert Bly's urging. But we took two other books ahead of him—we could only do two every season—and one of them was going to be James Wright's third book, which he was calling *Amenities of Stone.* These two books crowded James Dickey out, which was a pity because it was *Drowning with Others*—his best work, I still think. Maybe two months later, my phone rang one morning at about seven A.M. It was Willard Lockwood, director of the Wesleyan University Press, saying that Jim Wright had withdrawn his book. Wesleyan was about to go to press; there was no time for the committee to meet again. Would it be all right to substitute the runner-up book, which was James Dickey's? I called Dickey in Atlanta, then and there, seven-thirty in the morning, and asked, "Has your book been taken by another publisher? Can we still have it?" He said to go right ahead. So Wesleyan published James Dickey because James Wright withdrew his book.

INTERVIEWER

Did you get to know James Dickey?

HALL

I think I first met him out at Reed College, when he was teaching there for a semester. Poetry got him out of advertising and for a while he traveled from school to school, one year here and another year there. I'm not sure which year he spent at Reed—early sixties—but we had a good visit out there. Carolyn Kizer came down from Seattle. Jim and I drove around in his MG, talking. He was friendly, and flattering about my work, but I began to notice—because of things he said about other people—that loyalty might not be his strong point. So I asked him straight out, "Don't you think loyalty's a great

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quality?" He knew what I was up to; he said, "No, I think it's a terrible quality. I think it's the worst quality there is."

INTERVIEWER

Let's move away from editing other people to editing yourself. Could you talk about how you work? I gather that you revise a lot.

HALL

First drafts of anything are difficult for me. I prefer revising, rewriting. I'm not the kind of writer, like Richard Wilbur or Thomas Mann, who finishes one segment before going on to another. Wilbur finishes the first line before he starts the second. I lack the ability to judge myself except over many drafts, and usually over years. Revising, I go through a whole manuscript over and over and over. Some short prose pieces I've rewritten fifteen or twenty times; poems get up to two hundred fifty or three hundred drafts. I don't recommend it—but for me it seems necessary. And I do more drafts as I get older.

Or maybe I just like it. Even with prose, I love the late stage in rewriting. I *play* with sentences, revise their organization, work with the rhythms, work with punctuation as though I were handling line-breaks in poetry. In poetry I play with punctuation, line-breaks, internal sounds, interconnections among images. I tinker with little things, and it's my greatest pleasure in writing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you generally have several things going at once?

HALL

I'm not good at working on one thing straight through. When I work more than an hour on one project, I get irritated. Or sometimes I get too high. I spend my day working on many different things, never so long

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as an hour. When I get stuck, I put it down. Maybe I go haul some wood or have a drink of water; then I come back and pick up something else—an essay I'm working on, a book that's due in six months . . . I work on poems usually in one block of time for an hour or two hours—recently sometimes three hours; things have been hotting up—almost always on several poems.

It isn't just alternating projects; I switch around among genres, and I work in many: children's books, magazine pieces, short stories, textbooks. Obviously I care about poetry the most. But I love working with various kinds of prose also, even something as mundane as headnotes for an anthology. After all, I am working with the same material—language, syntax, rhythms and vowels—as if I were a sculptor who worked at carving in stone all morning, then in the afternoon built drywalls or fieldstone houses.

There's pleasure in doing the same thing in different forms. When I heard the story of the ox-cart man from my cousin Paul Fenton, I started work on a poem. It's a wonderful story, passed on orally for generations until I stole it out of the air: a farmer fills up his ox cart in October with everything that the farm has produced in a year that he doesn't need—honey, wool, deerskin—and walks by his ox to Portsmouth market where he sells everything in the cart. Then he sells the cart, then the ox, and walks home to start everything over again.

The best stories come out of the air. I worked on that ox-cart man poem, brief as it is, for about two years. Just as I was finishing it, I suddenly thought that I could make a children's book out of the same story. The children's book took me a couple of hours to write, hours not years, and the wage was somewhat better. When the book won the Caldecott, we were able to tear off the dingy old bathroom and put a new bathroom into an old bedroom and add a new bedroom; over the new bathroom I have a plaque: CALDECOTT ROOM.

Later I used the same ox-cart story as part of an essay,

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and as a song that Bill Bolcom set for Joan Morris to sing. Now I've used it again, here in an interview! Every time I tell the story it's different. The form makes it different, also the audience and therefore the tone, therefore the diction—which makes the whole process fascinating. In working on a play I used material from all over the place: from one prose book in particular, from other essays, from fiction, from poems. When I put these things into bodily action, and into dialogue on a stage—material that I had already *used up,* you might have thought—they take on new life, thanks to the collision with a different genre.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned sculpture a few minutes ago. What is it about Henry Moore that so fascinates you?

HALL

I had admired his work for a long time before I had the chance to interview him for *Horizon.* When I was an undergraduate I pinned a Penguin Print of Henry Moore's sculpture on my wall. When I first got to England in 1951, I saw his sculpture at the Festival of Britain. It was 1959 when I met him and interviewed him; three years later I came back and hung around him for a whole year—watching, listening—to do a *New Yorker* profile, which later became a book. Of all the older artists I've known, he's made the most difference for my own writing. He helped me get past a childish form of ambition: the mere striving to be foremost. He wasn't interested in being the best sculptor in England, or even the best sculptor of his generation. He wanted to be as good as Michelangelo or Donatello. He was in his early sixties when I met him first—my age now—and oh, he loved to work! At the same time he was a gentle, humorous, gregarious man. He got up early every morning—and he *got on with it.* I think of a story from the time when he and Irina were first married. They were going off into the country for a holiday, and Irina tried to lift one of the

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suitcases that Henry had brought but she couldn't get it off the ground. He'd packed a piece of alabaster. I am sure that they paid lots of attention to each other—but from time to time Henry went outside and tap-tapped with chisel and mallet.

I loved hearing him talk about sculpture, and everything he said about sculpture I turned to poetry. He quoted Rodin quoting a craftsman: "Never think of a surface except as the extension of a volume." I did a lot with that one.

INTERVIEWER

Did you envy him for the physicality of his materials?

HALL

The physical activity of the painter and the sculptor keeps them in touch with the *nature* of their art more than writing does for writers. Handwriting or typing or word processing—they're not like sticking your hands into clay.

Yet a poem has a body, just as sculpture and painting have bodies. When you write a poem, you're not hammering out the sounds with a chisel or spreading them with a brush, but you've got to *feel* them in your mouth. The act of writing a poem is a bodily act as well as a mental and imaginative act, and the act of reading a poem—even silently—must be bodily before it's intellectual. In talking or writing about poetry, too often people never get to the work of art. Instead they talk about some statement they abstract from the work of art, a paraphrase of it. Everybody derides paraphrase and everybody does it. It's the fallacy of content—the philosophical heresy.

INTERVIEWER

You were talking about writing prose. Tell us more about the relationship between your poetry and your prose.

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HALL

When I was young I wrote prose but I didn't take it seriously; it was terrible. I began to write real prose when I wrote *String Too Short to Be Saved,* mostly in 1959 and 1960; with that book I learned how to write descriptive and narrative reminiscence. Over the years, I've learned how to write other prose—to write for five-year-olds, stories for picture books; to write articles or reviews about poetry; to write prose for popular magazines, some of it objective or biographical—like my profile of Henry Moore; and to write about sports. Also I've written short stories, combining narrative prose with some of the shapeliness of poems. Writing prose for a living—free-lance writing—does another thing I like: it opens doors. Sir Kenneth Clark had me to lunch at his castle in Kent—because I was writing about Moore for *The New Yorker.* By sportswriting I made the major leagues, talking with Pete Rose and sitting up half the night with Willie Crawford. I've listened to the free association of Kevin McHale of the Boston Celtics.

INTERVIEWER

How did the baseball players accept you? As I remember, when you tried out for the Pirates you were bearded and, shall we say, a touch overweight?

HALL

I was bearded and weighed about two hundred fifty pounds when I tried out for second base with the Pittsburgh Pirates. Willie Randolph and Rennie Stennett *both* beat me out. (I was cut for not being able to bend over, which wasn't fair: Richie Hebner made the team at third base and he couldn't bend over either.) The players had nicknames for me, like "Abraham" and "Poet," and they treated me like a mascot. When I took batting practice, the whole team stopped whatever it was doing to watch—the comedy act of the decade. The players

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looked at me as some sort of respite from their ordinary chores; they were curious, and they were kind enough as they teased me. Mostly, athletes are quick-witted and funny, with maybe a ten-second attention span.

Back to the question: there are several relationships between my prose and my poetry. Prose is mostly the breadwinner. Poetry supplies bread through the poetry reading, but prose makes the steady income. I get paid for an essay once when it comes out in a magazine, then again when I collect it in a book. But also, I think that prose takes some of the pressure off my poetry. Maybe I am able to be more patient with my poetry—taking years and years to finish poems—because I continue to finish and publish short prose pieces.

Prose is tentative and exploratory and not so intense; in prose I can dwell on something longer, not just pick out the *one* thing to notice or say. Poetry is the top of the mountain. I like the foothills just fine—as long as I keep access to the top of the mountain.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever learned from critics?

HALL

Sure. When I was young, critics helped teach me to read poems. Then critics or poets-being-critics have—in person and by letter—led me to discard poems or to rip them up and start over again. I seek their abrasiveness out. I've even been helped by book reviews, mostly by some general dissatisfaction with my work. But if a book review is a personal attack—someone obviously *hates* you—it doesn't do any good. You just walk up and down feeling the burden of this death-ray aimed at you. The critics who help have been annoyed with my work, and make it clear why, without actually wanting to kill me. They give me new occasions for scrutiny, for crossing out.

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INTERVIEWER

Another subject. You're notorious for answering letters. Is your heavy correspondence related to your art? Doesn't it get in the way?

HALL

Sometimes I wonder: do I write a letter because it's easier than writing a poem? I don't think so. Letters take less time than parties or lunches. How do people in New York get anything done? My letters are my society. I carry on a dense correspondence with poets of my generation and younger. Letters are my café, my club, my city. I am fond of my neighbors up here, but for the most part they keep as busy as I do. We meet in church, we meet at the store, we gossip a little. We don't stand around in a living room and *chat*—like the parties I used to go to in Ann Arbor. I write letters instead, and mostly I write about the work of writing. There are poets with whom I regularly exchange poems, soliciting criticism. I don't think that either Robert Bly or I has ever published a poem without talking it over with the other. Also, I work out ideas in letters, things that will later be parts of essays. I dictate; it takes too much time to type and no one can read my handwriting.

INTERVIEWER

Let me ask a typical *Paris Review* question. Do you write your poems in long hand? On a typewriter? Or a word processor? Do you use a pen? A pencil?

HALL

For thirty or thirty-five years, I've written in long-hand—pencil, ballpoint, felt tip, fountain pen: the magic moves around. I used to work at poetry on a typewriter, but I tended to race on, to be glib, not to pause enough. Thirty years ago I gave up the keyboard, began writing in long hand, and hired other people to type for me. At

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the moment four typists help me out, and one right down the road has a word processor. It's marvelous because I can tinker without worrying about the time and labor of retyping. I make little changes in ongoing poems every day, and start with clean copies every morning.

I dictate letters but nothing else. It irritates me that Henry James was able to dictate *The Ambassadors* but I can't dictate the first draft of a book review.

INTERVIEWER

Were you ever part of a group of poets? Did you visit Robert Bly's farm in the early sixties in Madison, Minnesota?

HALL

There wasn't anything I would call a group. I did get out to the Blys' a couple of times. The summer of 1961 I was there for two weeks along with the Simpsons. Jim Wright came out from Minneapolis for the two weekends. We four males spent hours together looking at each other's poetry. Of course we had some notions in common, and we learned from each other, so maybe we *were* a group. I remember how one poem of mine got changed then, "In the Kitchen of the Old House." I'd been fiddling with it for two years. It began with an imagined dream—which just didn't go—and I said in frustration something like, "I remember when this started. I was sitting in the kitchen of this old house late at night, thinking about . . . " Three voices interrupted me: "Write it down! Write it down!" This poem needed a way *in.*

We worked together and we played competitive games like badminton and swimming, but poetry was the most competitive game. We were friendly and fought like hell. Louis was the best swimmer, and Robert always won the foolhardiness prize. There was a big town swimming pool in Madison where we went every day, and Robert would climb to the highest diving platform and

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jump off, making faces and noises and gyrating his body all the way down. I won at badminton.

Robert and I—he was Bob then, and I feel stiff saying "Robert"—met at Harvard in February of 1948, when I tried out for the *Advocate.* He had joined the previous fall, when he first got to Harvard, but I waited until my second term. After school was out that summer, he came down to Connecticut and stayed at my house for a day or two. I was nervous having my poet friend there, afraid of confrontation between Robert and my father. At lunch Robert said, "Well, Mr. Hall, what do you think of having a poet for a son?" As I feared, my father didn't know *what* to say; poetry was embarrassing, somehow. So I said, "Too bad your father doesn't have the same problem," and my father laughed and laughed, off the hook.

Robert and I have written thousands of letters back and forth, and we've visited whenever we could. You know these people who hate Robert and write about how clever he has been at his literary politicking? They don't know anything about it. For years and years he was a solitary. I remember a time before I moved to Ann Arbor, when Robert came back from Norway and stopped to visit while I lived outside Boston. He was talking about going back to the Madison farm and starting a magazine. He had discovered modernism in Norway and wanted to *tell* everybody—but also he wanted to remain independent. Knowing literary people would only make it harder for him, so he did not want to *know* anybody besides me. Then he said, "I don't want to know James Wright. How can I write about James Wright if I know James Wright?" He wasn't being nasty about Jim; he brought up Jim's name because Jim had just taken a job at the University of Minnesota—three or four hours away from Madison. They didn't get to know each other until a couple of years later, when Jim wrote him an anguished letter. Jim read Robert's attacks on fifties poetry in *The Fifties* and decided that everything Robert

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said was right and everything Jim was doing was wrong. Jim was always deciding that he was *wrong.*

Robert wanted solitude and independence. He was going to lecture everybody, as he always has done and still does, but from a distance. If he wanted eminence he wanted a lonely eminence. He came out of his isolation, I think, at that conference in Texas when he took the floor away from the professors. Do you know about that?

INTERVIEWER

No. This is something I haven't heard about.

HALL

It was a moment. The National Council of Teachers of English invited young poets, as they called us, to a conference in Houston in 1966. They brought Robert Graves over to lecture, and they brought in Richard Eberhart, calling him dean of the younger poets. Dick was fifty-two; that made him dean. Most of the young poets were forty or close to it. There was W.S. Merwin, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Gary Snyder, Carolyn Kizer, Robert, I . . . And also: Reed Whittemore, Josephine Miles, William Stafford, May Swenson. Young poets! Several of us flew down from Chicago together. We stood in the aisle of a 707 singing "Yellow Submarine"—Bly, Snyder, Creeley and I. We stayed up all night in somebody's room at the Houston hotel talking about poetry. Creeley had an over-the-shoulder cassette recorder, and every time Duncan spoke he turned it on, and every time Duncan finished speaking he turned it off. We stayed up until six in the morning and Eberhart's talk was at eight-thirty, so we didn't get a whole lot of sleep.

We met in a huge hall filled with thousands of English teachers. Eberhart talked about how the Peace Corps sent him to Africa; he observed a tribe of primitive people and told us that civilization lacked spontaneity. Dick discovers Rousseau! Someone else got up, a respondent, and said something silly. Then Lawrance Perrine, who

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edited the textbook *Sound and Sense,* stood up as another respondent. He talked conservatively about poetic form, saying something in praise of villanelles—in 1966!—which made it sound as if all poems were really the same; as if nothing mattered, not what you said or how you said it. I'm unfair, but all of us were tired, some of us were hung over, and everything we heard sounded fatuous after the energizing talk of the night before. So Robert stood up in the front row—turning around to face these thousands of people, interrupting the program—and said: "He's *wrong.* We care about poetry. Poetry *matters* and one thing is better than something else . . . " He went on; I can't remember . . . Whatever Bly said, it was passionate. It woke everybody up, I'll tell you. Thousands of teachers applauded mightily. As Robert sat down and the program was about to proceed, somebody in the audience said, "Let's hear from all the poets." So we took over, to hell with the program, and one by one each of us read a poem and talked. It was Vietnam time and a lot of us talked about politics. Robert gave the rest of us courage, and his platform life began at that moment: he found his public antinomian *presence.*

INTERVIEWER

Somehow one doesn't think of Robert Bly as having graduated from Harvard—but there were many poets there at the time, weren't there?

HALL

Robert went one year to St. Olaf in Minnesota and then transferred to Harvard. He and I overlapped for three years, becoming closest friends, always opposites. The two of us are Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. On the *Advocate* with us were Kenneth Koch and John Ashbery. Frank O'Hara was never on the *Advocate,* but he was a member of the first class I took in writing, taught by John Ciardi, who was a wonderful teacher. I remember John coming into class one day and saying something

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like, "I just sold eight poems to *The New Yorker,* I bought my first car, and next election I'll probably vote Republican." John supported Henry Wallace in 1948, very progressive. Be wary of what you joke about. O'Hara was writing poems then, but I didn't know it; I saw his short stories. Frank gave the best parties at Harvard: incongruous, outrageous bunches of people. I remember Maurice Bowra, visiting from Oxford, as he bounced and burbled on Frank's sofa. Frank was in Eliot House, as I was, and his roommate was the artist Ted Gorey—Edward St. John Gorey. Frank was the funniest man I ever met, utterly quick-witted and sharp with his sarcasm. Once in his presence I made some sort of joshing reference, comparing him to Oscar Wilde. Being gay was relatively open, even light, in the Harvard of those years. One of Frank's givens was that *everybody* was gay, either in or out of the closet. He answered me with a swoop of emphasis: "*You*'re the type that would *sue*."

I admired Ashbery; we *all* admired John, although in general we were not a mutual admiration society. In general we were murderous. John was at that time reticent, shy, precocious. He had published in *Poetry* while he was still at Deerfield Academy. On the *Advocate,* we were terribly serious about the poems we published. We would stay up until two or three in the morning arguing about whether a poem was good enough to be in the magazine. One time we had a half-page gap and asked John to come up with a poem. After some prodding, he conceded that *maybe* he had a poem. He went back to his room to get it, and it took him forty minutes. We didn't know it then, but of course—he later admitted—he went home and wrote the poem. In 1989 I told John this story—wondering if he remembered it as I did—and he even remembered the *poem,* which began, "Fortunate Alphonse, the shy homosexual . . . " He told me, with a sigh, "Yes, I took longer then."

One night Bly came back from a dance at Radcliffe saying he had met a girl from Baltimore, a doctor's

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daughter who knew all about modern poetry. Adrienne Rich! I met her and we dated, though we didn't get to know each other until a couple of years later. She published her first book, which Auden chose for the Yale Series of Younger Poets, when we were seniors. My second year at Oxford, she won a Guggenheim (at the age of twenty-two) and chose to spend her time in Oxford—not studying, just in town. That's when we became friends, and for several years we worked closely together. In 1954 and 1955 Adrienne and I were back in Cambridge at the same time. I baby-sat every morning while my wife went back to school, and one day a week Adrienne, pregnant with her first child, dropped by from eight in the morning until one o'clock. We talked poetry while I fed and bathed my son Andrew. Many years later, Adrienne and I were talking about those times, early marriages and casserole cookery, and we talked about the sex roles we played. "Don," Adrienne told me, "you taught me how to bathe a baby."

At Harvard, I also knew Peter Davison, L.E. Sissman, Kenward Elmslie. Bob Creeley left the term before I arrived. He was chicken farming in New Hampshire but I met him and talked poetry with him at the Grolier Book Shop, where you met everybody. Creeley and I got along famously, but a couple of years later I insulted him in a magazine piece and we were enemies for a while. A little while ago, Bob sent me a book which included a stick-figure account of his life, and he put a check mark by one item: he had quit a publishing venture, on Majorca with Martin Seymour-Smith, because Seymour-Smith wanted to print my poems.

Richard Wilbur was older—he was born in 1921, and at that time, seven years difference was something. While I was an undergraduate, he was a junior fellow, with a young family at home, so he had a room at Adams House to work in. He was such a generous man. I brought him poems to look at, and he showed me what he was up to. I remember him working on *Ceremony.* Archibald

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MacLeish came to Harvard as Boylston Professor when I was a junior. Dick Eberhart lived in Cambridge. Frost lived there fall and spring, and when I was a junior fellow Robert Lowell came to Boston. Quite a bunch.

INTERVIEWER

Did you know Lowell?

HALL

A little. *Lord Weary's Castle* was my favorite book of the time—which it still is—and I loved "Mother Marie Therese" and "Falling Asleep Over the Aeneid" from the next book. When the *Life Studies* poems started in magazines, a little later, it was totally shocking; but some were great. I can't remember how we met. He and Elizabeth Hardwick came to dinner and we went to their place. There was a bunch that met for a workshop a few times at John Holmes's house—Phil Booth and Lowell and me with Holmes. Lowell was gentle and soft-spoken—I never saw him when he was in trouble—but candid. These get-togethers were fine, but they never flew. Maybe I was too much in awe. For a while Lowell wrote me some of those postcards he was famous for. He wrote about an essay I did in which I said that every time I learned to make a new noise in poetry I found something new to say. He said he'd heard me say the same thing at a Harvard reading, and that it helped him toward *Life Studies.* A few years later, out in Ann Arbor, he came to my house and we spent an evening together drinking and reading poems out loud. He read me most of *Near the Ocean.* I was surprised by how much he wanted my approval—but of course, like anybody, he wanted *everybody's*. Then when he started doing self-imitations with the *Notebook* stuff, I was disappointed. Hell, I was furious—he let me down, as it were—and I attacked him in print. He quoted from one of my attacks in one of those little sonnets—and he rewrote my words a little, so that

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they sounded more pompous—but he didn't say whom he quoted. We never saw each other after that.

INTERVIEWER

After your time at Oxford, you spent a year at Stanford studying with Yvor Winters, whose name is not generally associated with yours. What came out of that experience?

HALL

I learned more about poetry in a year, working with Winters, than I did in the rest of my education. Also, I was fond of him—we even stayed in his house during Christmas vacation while he went off to visit relatives—but one incident in the spring gave me pause. At a party at his house, he said to me, "Would you get some more ice, son?" When he called me son it was as if he breathed in my ear; I'd follow him anywhere. I thought: *It's good I'm getting out of here.*

When I went to Stanford, I had already spent years working in a conservative poetic. In those days, most of us worked in a rhymed iambic line. I did it—James Wright, Louis Simpson, Galway Kinnell, Adrienne Rich, Robert Bly, W.D. Snodgrass, W.S. Merwin. When I applied for the fellowship, my work didn't depart greatly from the structure and metrics that Winters advocated. He thought I had some technical competence, or I wouldn't have had the fellowship. The best poem I wrote at Stanford was "My Son My Executioner," which could almost have come out of the seventeenth century—the abstract diction, the way it looks reasonable treating the irrational. For that one year I became briefly more conservative than ever, and it became known that I was the poetry editor for *The Paris Review.* Some old acquaintances sent me poems, including Frank O'Hara. Frank hadn't discovered himself, quite—but he wasn't writing rhymed iambic pentameter either. I rejected his poems

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and wrote a supercilious note. Stupid! Not long ago I came across Frank's answer, in which he accused me of writing second-rate Yeats, which was perfectly true. The letter is snippy, funny, outraged, but *cool.*

I regret I didn't have the brains to take his poems, but I couldn't read them then. I *did* do early work by Hill, Gunn, Bly, Dickey, Wright, Rich, Merwin . . . lots of people. But, also I rejected a good poem by Allen Ginsberg, who wrote George Plimpton saying that I wouldn't recognize a poem if it buggered me in broad daylight.

INTERVIEWER

Back to the way you write. Has it changed over the years?

HALL

When I was younger, poems arrived in a rush, maybe six or eight new things begun in two days, four days. I'd be in a crazy mood, inspired; I'd walk into furniture and not recognize my children. After the initial bursts, I would have my task set out before me—to bring out what was best, to get rid of the bad stuff, to work them over until I was pleased or satisfied. Then, for nine years or so—late thirties into forties—I was unable to write anything that was up to what I'd done earlier. I thought I'd lost it. After all, if you read biography, you know: *people lose it.* Then in the autumn of 1974 I started *Kicking the Leaves,* and most people think that's when I finally got started as a poet. I was forty-six.

With these new poems, I began to follow a different process of composition, one I've stuck with ever since. Usually now I begin with a loose association of images, a scene, and a sense that somewhere in this material is something I don't yet understand that *wants* to become a poem. I write out first drafts in prosaic language—flat, no excitement. Then very slowly, over hundreds of drafts, I begin to discover and exploit connections—between words, between images. Looking at the poem on

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the five-hundredth day, I will take out one word and put in another. Three days later I will discover that the new word connects with another word that joined the manuscript a year back.

Now inspiration doesn't come at once, several poems starting in a few days; it comes in the discovery of a single word after three years of work. This process never stops. When a new book of mine arrives in the mail, I dread reading it—because I know I will find words I want to change. I revise when I read my poems out loud to an audience. I change them when they appear in magazines or anthologies. I can't keep my hands off poems. I wrote "The Man in the Dead Machine" in 1965, published it in 1966, and I read it aloud a *thousand* times. Then in April of 1984, driving to the Scranton airport after a reading, I saw how to make it better. So I did.

The kind of poem I've taken to writing is something you could call the discursive ode. I call it an ode because although it's lyrical it tries for a certain length and inclusiveness. I call it discursive because it appears to wander, to move from one particular to another by association, though if it succeeds it finds a unity. It tries to connect things difficult to connect, things that at first seem diverse; often the images make a structural glue. I suppose it's largely a romantic form but one can find classical sources for it, in the satires, maybe in some of Horace's odes, maybe even in neoclassic poems by Johnson and Pope. But it flowers in the ode, even in something as short as the "Ode to a Nightingale" or later "Among School Children."

INTERVIEWER

You seemed, with *Kicking the Leaves,* to enter a third phase of your career. Somewhere, in an essay or interview, I believe you described the first two phases. In the first, you wrote a poetry of the top of the mind, where consciousness was very much in control. In the second phase, you reversed that, letting the unconscious mind

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rule, letting all sorts of unexpected and unsettling things into the poem. Now in the third phase it may be that you are combining the two.

HALL

That's a goal. Even when I was in the second phase, dredging things from the dark places, I wanted to bring them into the light. Freud said, "Where Id was, let there Ego be." I wanted to subject things—even subterranean things—to the light of consciousness. During the first phase, I had a dream of conscious control, *libido sciendi;* unconscious materials only occurred when I hid them from myself, as in "The Sleeping Giant," where I wrote an Oedipal poem without any idea of what I was doing. Today when I begin writing I'm aware: *something that I don't understand drives this engine.* Why do I pick *this* scene or image? Within the action of kicking the leaves something was weighted, freighted, heavy with feeling—and because I kept writing, kept going back to the poem, eventually the under-feeling that unified the detail came forward in the poem. The process is discovering by revision, uncovering by persistence.

INTERVIEWER

Was your recent long poem, *The One Day*, written in this way?

HALL

This material started to arrive during my years of flailing about. It came in great volcanic eruptions of language. I couldn't drive to the supermarket without taking a note pad with me. I kept accumulating fragments without reading them or rewriting; it was as if I was finding the stone that I would eventually carve sculpture from. Then when it stopped coming, I went back and read it. It was chaotic, full of inadequate language—and it was also scary. There was spooky stuff out of childhood; there was denunciation and mockery that years

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later went into "Prophecy" and "Pastoral." Something let me loose into this material, something that I was scared to revisit. So I let it rest, waiting until the lava cooled down and hardened. That took years. Finally, in 1979 or 1980, I took a deep breath and began to try to make it into poetry. And I added new material; half of the poem—or more—came during the later writing. There were false starts; at one point, maybe in 1982, I had a long asymmetric free verse poem in thirty or forty sections, each several pages long and with its own title. No good. Later I discovered the ten-line blocks that I could build with. I could keep them discrete or I could bridge from one to the next.

INTERVIEWER

When you describe your process of discovery, in conversation, you seem almost to be describing the process of free association that a psychoanalyst asks for. Is this parallel valid?

HALL

It's no accident. I spent seven years in therapy, up to three times a week, with a Freudian analyst. He was an old man with a light Austrian accent and athletic eyebrows; I would explain, carefully and reasonably, why I had done something cruel or stupid; his eyebrows would do the high jump. We fell into the habit of treating poems as dreams. When you bring a dream to a therapist or analyst, he or she isn't likely to pay attention to the manifest content, but if you have a table in that dream he may ask, "What does the table look like?" The table might be the key to what the dream—or the poem—is actually about. In "The Alligator Bride" there's an Empire table. Freudian analysis is a word cure, and it resembles the way we read or write poems. Poems that I wrote in my frenzy were *like* dreams, because they allowed something unconscious to loosen forth. Those years allowed me to overcome fears of hidden things and let

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them out. Coming into my doctor's office, I learned how to tap instantly into the on-flowing current inside my head. That essential step took me about a year, but once you learn it you don't lose it. I learned to listen for the vatic voice, to watch images running over the mind-screen, to give a telegraphic account of what I heard and saw. It was good for me as a creature and good for me as a poet. Even now I talk with my doctor every day of my life and he explains the sources of feeling—although he's dead. Eventually it was psychotherapy that allowed me to recover my life. And to write *The One Day.*

INTERVIEWER

So there is a sense in which you are touching a deeper Donald Hall in this material.

HALL

I hope so, yes. Not in any boring autobiographical way. In *The Happy Man* I have a poem in which somebody talks about his time in the detox center. A friend asked me what I was in detox for. Well, I never was. For the poem I made up a character; I talked through a mask I invented, which I do all the time. I love to fool people, even with fake epigraphs—but also I wish they weren't fooled. Of course my poems use things that have happened to me—but they go beyond the facts. Even when I write about my grandfather, I lie. I don't believe poets when they say "I," and I wish people wouldn't believe me. Poetic material starts by being personal but the deeper we go inside the more we become everybody.

INTERVIEWER

Has the passage of time, the coming of age if you will, caused any other changes in your notions about your poetry, your career as a poet?

HALL

I'm more patient now. When I was in my twenties, I wanted to write many poems. I had goals; when I

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reached them, they turned out to be not worth reaching. When you begin, you think that if you could just publish a few poems, you'd reach your desire; then if you could publish in a good magazine; then if you could publish a book; then . . . When you've done these things you haven't done anything. The desire must be, not to write another dozen poems, but to write something as good as the poems that originally brought you to love the art. It's the only sensible reason for writing poems. You've got to keep your eye on what you care about: to write a poem that stands up with Walt Whitman or Andrew Marvell.

Another thing that's changed is my sense of daily time. I spent years of my life daydreaming about a future, I suppose in order to avoid a present that was painful. Teaching in Ann Arbor I daydreamed about a year in England. Mentally I lived always a step ahead of myself, so that the day I lived in was something to get through, on the way to something else. Pitiful! After I left teaching, when Jane and I had lived at Eagle Pond for a year, I realized: I'm aware of the hour I live in; I'm not daydreaming ahead to a future time; I know which direction the wind blows from, and where the sun is; I'm alive in the present moment, in what I do *now,* and in where I'm doing it. This present includes layers of the past—there's so much past here at Eagle Pond—but it doesn't depend on a daydream future which may never arrive.

INTERVIEWER

You've always written a lot about Eagle Pond, things like how your grandmother used to stand at that kitchen window in the morning and check the mountain. Well, it's the same window today and the same mountain. The profound presence of the past in a place like this, even the felt presence of those who have lived here but are now dead, the cows and other animals in your poems—does all this have anything to do with the general elegiac cast to your poetry?

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HALL

My grandmother's father, who was born in 1826 and who died fifteen years before I was born, looked out that same window to check that same mountain. I stand in the footprints of people long gone—which I find an inspiriting connection; it belittles the notion of one's own death; it says: "That's all right. Everybody who has looked at this mountain has died or will die. *Then others will look at it.*" A sense of continuity makes for an elegiac poetry. One of my first published poems, when I was sixteen, was about a New Hampshire graveyard. When we were at Harvard, Robert Bly used to call me the cellar-hole poet—like a graveyard poet in the eighteenth century. When I spent my childhood summers here, among the old people, *absence* was everywhere. Walking in the woods I found cellar holes, old wells, old walls. Even now you can sometimes feel under your feet, in dense woods, the ruts that plows made long ago.

INTERVIEWER

As you talk about this, I hear almost a sacred sense of place. You have written about attending church here as primarily a social experience—but you are also a deacon, and I am wondering about the more serious implications of this activity.

HALL

It began from a social feeling, but moved on—from community to communion. When I was a child I went to church every Sunday simply because that was what we did. Uncle Luther, my grandmother's older brother, who grew up in this house, was our preacher. He'd retired from a Connecticut parish and at eighty delivered lucid fifteen-minute sermons without a note in front of him. He was born in 1856 and could remember the Civil War. I used to sit on the porch and get him to tell me stories about the Civil War.

I enjoyed church as a child—sitting beside my grandfather, all dressed up, who fed me Canada mints. But I

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can't say that I was taken with Christian thought or theology. When I was about twelve I had the atheist experience. I suddenly realized, with absolute clarity, that there was no God. With this knowledge, I felt superior to other people. Twenty years later, when I was living in an English village called Thaxted, I fell into the habit of attending church every Sunday, I *thought* without religious feeling; I loved the ceremony, and the wonderful old communist vicar, Jack Putterill. His church used a pre-prayer book service that was so high only dogs could hear it, and his sermon, after incense and holy water, was a fifteen-minute communist homily. I thought I attended these services out of aesthetic and social motives; now I suspect that I harbored religious feelings I feared to acknowledge.

In Ann Arbor I never went to church. When Jane and I moved back here, I must have been ready. On that first Sunday, I thought, "They will expect us to go to church." We decided to go just that once. In the middle of his sermon, our minister quoted Rilke. I'd never heard Rilke quoted in the South Danbury Church! We were already fond of the people—mostly cousins—and we went back next Sunday, and the next. Slowly, we started reading the Gospels, and some Christian thought—like "The Cloud of Unknowing," Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich. At one point that winter Jane was sick and couldn't go. I said, "I'll stay home with you." Five minutes before church, I said, "I can't stand it," and off I went. These feelings amazed me . . . and they were accompanied by thoughts: our minister ranged all over the place in his sermons. He loved Dietrich Bonhoffer, the German Protestant theologian who plotted against Hitler and was executed, a modern saint and martyr.

By this time, I would like to call myself a Christian, though I feel shy about it. We have many visitors whom Christianity makes nervous; they seem *embarrassed* for us. So many people expend their spirituality piecemeal on old superstitions like astrology that they entertain but don't believe in—like the imperial Romans and their

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gods. I dislike contemporary polytheism, that nervous searching which provides itself with so many alternatives that it doesn't stick itself with belief: the God-of-the-Month Club.

The minister who loved Bonhoffer and mentioned Rilke was Jack Jensen, who died of cancer in 1990. We feel terrible grief over him. He taught at Colby-Sawyer College, nearby, and had a divinity degree from Yale as well as a Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University, a man of spirit and brains together. Watching him, listening to him, I became aware that it was possible to be a Christian although subject to skepticism and spiritual dryness. I used to think that Christians believed *everything,* and *all the time,* which is nonsense. If you have no dry spells, I doubt your spirit. We watched Jack live through the deserts, when he would give sermons that were historical or philosophical. After a while he would liven up, go spiritually green again. He was a great one for Advent, the annual birth or rebirth of everything possible. Although the history of the church is often horrible—I always think of Servetus, the Spanish humanist condemned to the stake by the Italian inquisition, who escaped to Zurich, where Calvin's people burned him—still, there's power in two thousand years of worship and ritual coded into our Sundays. In China we went to an Easter service and heard the choir belt out "Up from the Grave He Arose" in Chinese. So much culture and geography collapses into the figure of Christ. That's what remains, after all, at the bottom of the two thousand years—this extraordinary figure in Palestine, the figure of Christ.

INTERVIEWER

I haven't asked you about Jane Kenyon. There are after all two poets of Eagle Pond Farm.

HALL

I know. Everything that my life has come to—coming here, the church, my poems of the last fifteen years—

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derives from my marriage to Jane in 1972. And I've watched her grow into a *poet.* Amazing. Of course we work together, show each other what we're doing, occasionally getting a little huffy with each other but helping each other all the same. But it's living with her that's made all the difference for me. We have the church together as well as the poetry and baseball. But I don't want to go on about it. I don't want to sound like someone making an acknowledgement in a book. Some day she'll do her own *Paris Review* interview.

INTERVIEWER

Let's end with one more historical question. Since we are talking just now on the stage at the Y in New York City, I wonder if you would tell me the story of the first reading you gave here.

HALL

I think it was in 1956, thirty-four years ago, that I read here for the first time. I was on a program with May Swenson and Alastair Reid, and I read third. In those days, instead of all three of us sitting out here and listening to each other, we waited in the green room until it was our turn. I was nervous. This reading might have been my second or third ever, certainly my first in New York City—and this was the Y. I nipped at the Scotch that Betty Kray provided in the green room. Then I thought about where I was and I nipped some more. When I came out here to read, I was still able to see the pages of my book, and I didn't fall down, but I was horrible. I was at a stage of drunkenness that allowed me to think that I was George Sanders. I felt wonderful sophistication and coolness, sure that everything I said was utterly witty and wonderful. I was a horse's ass.

—Peter Stitt

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Two Poems by John Ash

The Ungrateful Citizens

It occurs to me that I would like to write a poem
about Naples.
Perhaps I have always wanted to do this, and only
realized it just a moment ago,
but, alas, I have never been to Naples, and yet my
desire to write about the place
becomes more insuperable by the second. I become
convinced that my writing desk
is on the same latitude as Naples: I have only to lean
back in my chair,
and I incline towards the city of my dreams, and in
my dreams my feet
rest in Manhattan while my hair rustles against the
wharves of Naples,
and the wharves are bristling with galleons, feluccas,
sloops and schooners,—
and how blue the sea on which they sway and jostle,
how blue the sky
above them, except for some small clumps of cloud so
white they are like
roses that have seen ghosts! And one could wander
forever in the streets
that are as narrow and crooked as the wrinkles on the
face of a wise and beautiful old woman.
Here all the shop signs are like the titles of arias by
Alessandro Scarlatti.
The streets and squares are always busy, yet no one is
ever too hurried:
at the slightest opportunity a man or a woman of
Naples will sit down with you

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on some weathered marble doorstep and engage you
in the most animated conversation
concerning art or politics, your origins, their mother,
the latest songs or scandals.
A citizen of Naples will say: "Oh, you are from
Brooklyn? I have a cousin there.
He tells me it is a very beautiful place." He will say
this out of pure courtesy.
In no other city have I seen so many fragrant pots of
flowering bergamot,
or such luscious leaves of basil, or so many balconies
overhung by noble bosoms.
In the late afternoon it is customary for the singers to
leave the opera house,
and go about their business in full costume: here is
the Orfeo of Monteverdi
haggling over the price of some pomegranates, and
over there Donna Elvira
is sipping an espresso in a café while sharing a secret
with a disheveled Desdemona;
Don Carlos leaves a haberdasher's in a fury while
Pinkerton enters a tobacconist's,
and Melisande (still in character) weeps beside a
baroque public fountain
and here is Poppaea, and Dido, and Ariadne, and
Judith, and Violeta . . .
and there goes Madame Butterfly's child eating a fruit
like a setting sun
as he saunters down toward the waterfront. There, on
the broad esplanade,
with its prodigous statuary, many restaurants are to be
found,
and they are at once elegant and welcoming. During
the heat of the day
their cool marble floors and gently rotating fans are a
delight,
and in the evenings entire families go out to dine
dressed in the finest clothes,

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and how charming are the pink and white dresses of
the young girls
who resemble gardenias or oleander flowers as they
settle lightly into their seats.
The families are very large which is why the
restaurants are so spacious—
stretching away into shimmering distances in which
the fans stir the torpid fronds of palms—
and why the menus are as long and varied as the
colors of autumn.
Here the generations are nightly conjoined in perfect
amity,
and even shy lovers may find corners in which to
commune unnoticed
except by some musician who wishes only to urge
their love forward
from a tactful distance. The food, it goes without
saying, is delicious.
In Naples the taxi drivers have, of necessity, become
expert in the negotiation
of long flights of stairs resembling formalized
cascades,
and the buses constantly circling monuments to heroes
of the *Risorgimento*
seem to be dancing a *siciliano* as the sunlight rebounds
from their windows
and shatters against the high walls of tenements.
Beyond those walls, however,
in some lightless courtyard a skinny child is crying
under lines of washing
that repeat, day after day, the same doleful sentence,
and I am reminded
that this is the city in which songbirds were once
blinded so they would sing
more poignantly in churches on saints' days, beating
against the domes and the vaults . . .
and it seems that despite the cheerful beggarwomen
and roguish merchants

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bowed down by enormous, tufted turbans, despite the bravado
of virile gentlemen dressed like eighteenth-century courtesans that I had imagined for my Naples,
despite the numberless palaces and paintings, the extravagant churches, theaters
and festivals, and the flowers that perfume even the poorest quarters,
it seems that all but the richest and most conservative of citizens cannot wait to leave my Naples.
They wish to go to the north or far to the west. They crowd the quays and the airport lounges,
and exhibit the horrible condition of their skin, the rags they are forced to wear,
the few possessions they drag behind them like so many coffins filled with stones.
They glare at me and say: "This is not Naples. This is a place on which the world has turned its back.
A cloud of lies covers it. The mansions that you saw are hovels, the churches tin shacks,
the parks and gardens, vegetable plots and stony fields in which we scratch for a living.
And this is not even the site of wars and massacres, only a place of ordinary wretchedness.
No, we cannot be the amorous ballet the tourist requires for a backdrop—
O take us away, perhaps to that *island of fragrant grasses* mentioned in a fragment of Petronius."

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The Seventeenth Sermon

In the turbulent career of the patriarch Photius
there can have been few days more glorious
than Saturday March 29th 867.
It was on this day that he delivered his seventeenth
sermon,
On the Inauguration of the Image of the Virgin,
in the great church of the Holy Wisdom
in the presence of the emperors Michael III and Basil I.
It was Easter and the long night of iconoclasm—
the rule of those "shameful emperors now universally
deplored"—
had ended. The patriarch indicated
a group of worshippers dressed all in white, men
who had recently abjured the execrable doctrines
of the Quartodecimans, according to whom Easter
should be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the lunar
month,
whether or not it was a Sunday. As Photius
continued to speak with his customary eloquence and
erudition
the devout gathering could see in the apse behind him
the new image of the enthroned Virgin and her Child,
seeming to float on a gold ground, and flanked by the
archangels
Michael and Gabriel. To Photius it seemed
as if the Virgin were about to speak, to explain
to any sceptics her paradoxical status as virgin and
mother,
for her lips seemed of real flesh, pressed together and
still
as in the sacraments. Her gaze was compassionate
yet detached, directed toward a child and eternity;
her image was a silent script from which both the learned

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and the ignorant could acquaint themselves with the truths
of Christian doctrine. But a man
of Photius's intellectual refinement could not
countenance a merely didactic philosophy of art.
He did not neglect the aesthetic properties:
by its beauty and harmony of proportion
the image gave delight and strength to the spectator,
and predisposed the mind to accept the order of the universe.
All of this Photius further claimed was an act of restoration:
the church, though still scarred and wounded,
had now regained some of her ancient beauty; sadness was cast off,
and she was once again clothed in her bridal garment.
In this respect the patriarch was almost certainly mistaken,
since all the evidence suggests that the original decoration
of the church consisted of abstract vines and garlands
framing many simple representations of the cross.
Photius's "forms imprinted on the tablets of the soul" did not
exist in the time of Justinian and Anthemius.

In the course of his sermon the patriarch also took care
to praise Michael and Basil, calling them
"a beloved pair of pious emperors, father and son,
shining in royal purple," but according to the histories
Michael was a notorious drunkard,
given to loutish acts of vandalism while Basil,
his adopted son, was an illiterate peasant,
born of a Slav mother and an Armenian father.
His magnificent physique had caught the emperor's eye

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as he was passing by the palace stables one day,
and it seems likely that the two men became lovers.
It is certain that they shared the favors
of the same woman, one Eudocia Ingerina,
and as he delivered his sermon Photius must have thought
of the fate of his benefactor, the Caesar Bardas.
It has been said in Michael's defence that although
unfit to rule he allowed better men to govern for him,
chief among them his uncle the Caesar, enlightened
founder of the new university of the Magnaura Palace,
but in the spring of the previous year Basil
had killed Bardas in the presence of the emperor,
and immediately afterwards was himself raised to the throne.
In the months that followed the seventeenth sermon
the two men grew suspicious of each other.
Michael drank while Basil made plans, disposing
of Michael on the evening of September 23rd 867.
Such were the men Photius lauded as "beloved" and "pious,"
and such was the beginning of the Macedonian golden age,
for against all expectation Basil ruled wisely,
and his family held the throne for nearly two centuries,
and art and learning flourished, and magnificent churches
were built, and the borders of the empire steadily expanded.
In the eastern apse of Saint Sophia the subject
of Photius's sermon can still be seen: the Virgin's robe
is a fathomless blue, the archangels' wings exhaust the rainbow.

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Debora Greger

Briar Rose

Where is paradise without the gate?
Ask any gardener, his bags of bonemeal busy
keeping the weedy world at bay.

Within its boxwood walls, like that great kitchen
the cook hungered after,
a place for everything, and everything in it

named by scholar and scullery maid:
between *Rosa canina* and *foetida,* next to "Adam"
and "Little White Pet," the briar

a mother's thorned thanksgiving named me for,
pricking the very air's approach.
Ask any man with sense enough not to try for me

that century I slept in state:
men who did wound up as bones of stories
tendril by barbed tendril woven,

sentence by overgrown sentence, into mine—
all but you, the thicket parting,
thorns going soft as you breezed past.

What is paradise without a gate?
I slept the sleep of that first man who slept so deep
he didn't miss the bone he gave up.

What must his waking words have been? *Is it you?*
How long you have kept me waiting.
I give him mine. Given back a voice gone feral

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that squeaked and croaked,
I gave you a talking-to cut off by your long—
no, the briefest kiss.

Think of your gardens when we're not there.
No longer does the moorhen cross the pond
on stepping stones of lily pads that if it rushes

bear its feathered weight.

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Nin Andrews

The Artichoke

The first time I saw it, I thought what an ugly specimen. It looked like Grandma's bathing cap, grown green and small after all these years. I sliced it open and tasted the pale flesh. And gradually she offered herself up leaf by leaf. In her depths she held a tiny, faded star, a spark that fell in the meteor shower over Frank's garden. I developed a taste for her expensive style: fancy restaurants, wines by candlelight. Sometimes we stayed inside and read by firelight, drinking the leftover melted butter, wiping the grease on shirt sleeves. I introduced her to friends. She had the heart of a Buddha. Green leaves of flame. Everyone adored her, said she was irresistible. Nightly I grasped her like a seashell and listened to the nothing philosophers spend lifetimes writing about. I became accustomed to the look of a chilled vegetable, kept in the icebox all day. Then one evening there were no leftovers. I went to the grocery store. The sales clerk said artichokes are out of season. This is not San Diego. Still I dreamt of her, dipped in lemony butter, scraped carefully with teeth and sucked, the pale cream of flesh, the tender flower, her skirt held up like a cup, each sip bringing me closer to the moon, the vegetable pearl of her insides where the heart fans out fibrous hairs and waits a last mouthful on her green world.

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Two Poems by Gabrielle Glancy

The Point That Is This Moment

Alighting on
the point

that is
this moment

there is a balance
that tips

night imperceptibly
to day,

as blue catches
up with

itself and opens
the box

we call dawn.
It is

not so much
a pressure,

as a flicker of

blindness that
layers

luminous white
across

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the horizon's
edge.

Otherwise, how
could there

be summer?
Above

our heads, clouds
push

the sky backwards.
That

much is clear.
But do they

disappear when
we can't

see them? Holding
a lemon

tree, leaves brushed
with green,

in a certain
posture

against the field.
I am

talking about
uncertainty

and the forward
movement

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of time. There
could,

for example, be
another

way to say it,
as there is

always another moment
drawing back

from this one,
the sky,

against velvet
leaves,

falling infinitely
away.

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Deer on the Way to Work

So as I was saying, on the way to work I saw
a deer. Sliding out of a turn, I was speeding:
He looked up in the slow way only a deer can,
without a single movement. I began to cry.

A deer? Sliding out of a turn and speeding
into the hill. I thought: Great Dane!
Without a single movement I began to cry.
I had been listening to a song that spoke of you.

Into the hill. I thought: Great Dane?
How could that be? I was transfixed.
I had been listening to a song that spoke of you
And thinking how many worlds we'd come.

How could that be? I was transfixed.
No further evidence was needed. This was God.
And thinking how many worlds we'd come!
Suddenly the sun split the window in two.

No further evidence was needed. This was God.
I had been searching the hill for a vision when
Suddenly the sun split the window in two.
Were you with me? Did you see him?

I had been searching the hill for a vision.
And unabashed as if waiting he came into sight.
Were you with me? Did you see him?
He looked up in the slow way only a deer can.

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Mary Stewart Hammond

My Mother-in-law Sailing

Her heart fails her and the body holding it
lies on its side, the lungs taking on fluid
so it will be, we are told, like drowning
we can't stop and each week's watch is a hot
potato we relay over Nantucket Sound rotating
by ferry in partial acceptance full steam ahead
from Woods Hole to the Vineyard and back
like sailboats on moorings, the buds on trees
at each landfall swelling, halyards banging
and banging aluminum masts,

the hull of her wooden, gaff-rigged Sneakbox
reassembling from rot, the rudder tugging
loose from coffee-table legs, the mast
floating, cradled in cobwebs, down
from the Boathouse rafters, drifting
dreamy, end over end toward the hull,
its foot settling into the step, ready
for the sail's climb and
blossoming, its lifting
of the boat through the water
maybe on a beam reach, or running
before the wind, something full and easy
enough for the boom to lift and dip a bit
in air just right for benediction.

It will be a clear day and the sky will be white
all the way to the horizon
and blue at the top,

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with no spit of beach beckoning
under the shorn hills and scrubby pine,
with no landfall,
the strum of the water in the tiller,
and "Tea for Two," or "Wild Flower," on the
Victrola.

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John Lindgren

Three Views of an Iris

I

An ink-drop plumed in water,
a wound on the open air, and the air
suffering itself.
The petals give off a dark-light, like
the opposite of phosphorescing.
From across the room it's a flame-hole
blown into the cloth of space, a strange
sun at the other end. It's a trembling
well of darkness descending into the hard,
green-gold chlorophyll and diamond-tipped
wind of evening sunglare.

II

A closer look reveals the blue-dark knot
undone, the torn tissues of the lips,
the disheveled velvets and violet silks
of a woman hurrying to a tryst
with a cruel and faithless lover.
She is breathless. Her cheeks are cold
and ice-lit.

III

Look carefully. It is the darkness
of a tiger's mouth, the vacant gaze
of the mystic, the addict's speedless
stare. It is the empty pupil in the dreaming
eye of the sleeper who will never wake.

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Sandra McPherson

Precipice, Rush, Sheath

on a cliff at Yachats, central Oregon coast

"Hold, just grab the grass," counseled my link
to the humanized, floricultured top,
when, on the incoming tide, the waves
tall and brown in a fog, basaltic
black sand submerging rough under foam,
we decided to leave by the cliff, take the face
up through roots, wrap each grip
around a tuft.
I did clutch one
and identified it then as "Juncus
Lesueurii," a rush, not a grass,
clove-colored rumpled corsage on whose stalk
we depended. There, a stark, care-cut,
unforeseen inflorescence burst and froze
while midday darkened, sky pulling in
the heavy blue of mussel shells.

Beneath the overhang, only it
kept our midway, unbelonging bodies
from falling through its garden
without footholds. It held only hands.
And we had to turn back, without turning around,
greet in reverse all the salt
rush which would lower us through
the plant's world view
of the descending sun.

Imagine: this edge, the wind blows,
and you nod here, energetic and cellular,
in your green sheath after dark . . .

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The Great Chain of Being

Kim Edwards

My father was a man who believed history repeated itself. Not in the large ways, of nations and of wars, but in the smaller ways of families. He was a religious man, and he believed that the patterns of the universe were fixed in place, infinite but static, revealed to the devout through the pure concentration of prayer. What is destiny, and what is in the power of a single individual? Ask my father and he would have answered that everything is destiny. That is the answer of our religion, the answer he was obliged to give. That was the answer he applied to us, his children.

He was small, but powerful, with a smooth, bald head that made him seem both wise and ageless. In those days before our country's independence he had great influence, and he carried himself with a dignity that was almost regal. I understand now that the legacies he gave us were not more than the quick glint of memory, the sudden surfacing of a half-remembered dream. But at the time I believed, we all did, that they came to him through some kind of divine inspiration, tumbling from his lips

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without warning, like coins spilling suddenly from a shaft of sunlight.

"Jamaluddin," he would say, peering at my brother with a gaze both terrible and intent, "takes after his great-uncle Sayed in every trait." And we would remember our great-uncle, who stood straight and clear-eyed even as an old man, who had led the army against the Communist rebellion before we were even born. From that day on we would call our brother Sayed, at first jokingly, later in all seriousness, until his real name was only a notation in my father's files. One brother took after a healer, another resembled an ancient trader. When my sisters were born my father claimed they were direct images of my twin aunts, the most beautiful women in my father's village. Years later, when he said this about them, you could see their faces glow, you could see the way they pulled themselves up taller, straightened their shoulders, tossed back their hair and smiled the smiles of lovely women.

Of his thirteen children I was the seventh, the first girl, and the one who waited longest for this legacy of names. My father was an important man, some would say a great one, and we had been trained not to intrude upon his days. Nonetheless, I strayed into his vision now and then, hoping to inspire him. I sang beneath his window, thinking of Shala, the great poet in the family, who soothed whole villages with her songs. I brought him plates of biscuits I had made, cut with a childish hand, thinking of my grandmother, whose house I remembered as being always full of the sweet smells of coconut and spice. My father took these offerings, absently; he ran his knuckles across my shoulder blades when he passed me, singing, in the hall. But although it was my turn, he never looked down twice. I remained Eshlaini, I had no other name.

One day my mother found me weeping in the kitchen.

"Eshlaini," she said, stepping lightly across the tiles and holding me close. She was pregnant with her eleventh child then, and I told my sad story into the curve of

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her flesh: two brothers, younger than I, had been given names when I had not. My mother listened, stroking my hair, and when I finished she took my face between her two hands and gazed at me for a moment before she spoke.

"Eshlaini," she said. "Listen to it closely. Eshlaini. It's a name that I chose for you, a name I hope you will keep forever. There is a star in the night sky, a lovely star, and bright. I watched that star the night you were born, and when I fell asleep I dreamed about that star and woke up with your name, Eshlaini, on my lips. Thanks to God I have had many children, given many names, but soon yours will be the only one that remains. Now, my daughter, stop your tears. Take joy in your pretty name, Eshlaini."

From that day on I stopped wishing for another name, and soon enough I had another brother. My mother let me hold him, new as he was. I remember the redness of his skin, his shock of dark hair, the way he was a moving bundle of heat in my arms. In those days they followed the traditional ways, and my mother had massages every morning in a bed placed over a stove of slowly burning coals. The midwife rolled the warm rocks on my mother's belly. I sat in the corner, my arms a tense and careful cradle, listening to what they said.

"How does that feel?" the midwife asked, pressing the rock this way, then that, against my mother's flesh. I heard my mother catch her breath, I saw the edge of her white teeth biting on her lower lip.

"It hurts," my mother said. "Though the labor was fast, it hurts this time like it has no other."

The midwife frowned, and probed my mother's belly with her fingers.

"You should have no more," she said. "If you give life again, you will pay with your own life. That's what I fear, Shalizah. Eleven children! You should be satisfied." There was a moment of silence before she spoke again. "You should. And so should he."

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"Eshlaini," my mother said, raising herself on her elbows. "Bring the baby over here."

I did as I was told, and rocked my brother back and forth as the midwife bound my mother up with cloth soaked in herbs and oils.

"What will you name this one?" she asked, tugging a strip of cloth so tightly that my mother winced.

"I don't know yet," she said, studying my little brother's face. "I have to get to know him a bit first. Zul, perhaps. That seems to suit him."

The midwife handed my mother a glass of greenish liquid, so pungent it made my nose wrinkle up.

"It's not right," she said, wiping her herb-stained hands on her apron, "to give a child one name for the first years, then change it to another. What they become is not his choice."

My mother sighed and drank the green drink, then made a face and held her hand out to me.

"I have them for the first five years or so," she said. "He never takes an interest until then." She smiled at me and pulled me close. "And Eshlaini's mine. I'll always have Eshlaini."

"It isn't right," the midwife repeated.

"It's not for us to question," my mother said serenely.

She did not question, or if she did my father's words soothed away her fears. After all, many people say that he was the most eloquent speaker of his generation. I remember glimpsing him in his study, straight and dignified in his hard chair, surrounded by other men, the ceiling fan making its slow rotation above their heads. No matter how many others were in attendance, it was my father's voice I heard most often, as dark and melodious and as forceful as a monsoon rain. It was my father's hands I saw, raised to emphasize his words, it was my father who spoke of choices they must make, of setting a course to guide them through the coming years. He claimed through his daily prayers to believe in destiny,

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but he spoke like a man who felt the world turn and quiver on his command.

As my mother must have done, for despite the warning of the midwife she was pregnant again within a year. From the beginning it was difficult, and she was confined to bed. I used to go and sit next to her, let her comb my hair beneath the steady whir and click of the ceiling fan. Her fingers were strong, massaging my scalp, and the braids she made pulled at the skin around my temples. Even today, so many years later, I sometimes braid my hair to evoke those moments: heat raising a fine sweat on our foreheads, the tropical sun muted by wooden shutters pulled tightly closed, the vile, medicinal glass of herbal tea she sipped at throughout the day.

My mother's labor began when the fruit trees ripened, just after the hot season and before the monsoon, and at first we believed it was an omen of good luck, that she would avoid the fevers of the first and the chilling cold of the second, that she would bear the fruit of her body in a timely way, and live.

Her labor began early in the morning, and by noon that day I had a sister. She was placed in the room next to my mother's, the room I sometimes slept in, and I was put in charge of her. Tiny sister, even wrapped in blankets she was small, just four pounds at birth. I touched her miniature fingers, the lobe of her ear, the blue veins visible beneath the translucent skin of her forehead. Through the open door I saw my mother sleeping, her dark hair like a shadow between the dual paleness of the pillow and her face. The midwife was gone, and I stood in the doorway for a moment, listening to my mother's even breathing in the rising heat of the room.

For the next two hours the peace held. I watched my sister and kept the silence like a long extended prayer. And I was startled, but not surprised, sometime in the afternoon, when I heard the panting begin again, the soothing words of the midwife interspersed with the groans my mother made. Alarmed, I left my sister and

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ran into the other room. The sheets were stained red, and the midwife barely glanced up from her massaging of my mother.

"What is it?" I cried. "What's wrong?"

"There is another coming," said the midwife. "Your first sister has a twin. Now go quietly and watch her, and do not worry about your mother. You must trust her to me now, and to God."

This second labor was longer than the first. It seemed to me that way even with no clock to measure it. I fed my sister, changed her, felt the day's heat rise and culminate and finally recede. Later they told me that it took twelve hours, but to me those hours of muffled screams and groaning felt like days, like years. It was past midnight when the midwife brought the second sister to my room. She was smaller than the first and more fragile.

"Eshlaini!" the midwife said. With the strain of birthing she had forgotten all about me. "Have you been here all this time?" I nodded. There was a bed in the room, but I sat stiff and alert on a single straight chair. I was exhausted, and very afraid—the night air seemed to crackle with spirits and emotions never visible in the day.

"Child," she said, putting her hand on my shoulder. "You must sleep."

"I want to see my mother," I said.

"She's sleeping now. The best thing you can do is sleep as well."

"She's dead," I said. "I know it."

The midwife looked surprised, then troubled. "No, she isn't dead. Oh, child," she said, and even though I was nine years old and tall for my age, even though she herself had worked past exhaustion, she picked me up and carried me to my mother's room. My mother's breathing was shallow, uneven, she looked as pale as the new babies she had borne. But when I touched her on the arm I felt her warmth, and some string held tight within me started to release.

"There," the midwife said, stroking my hair, pressing

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my head against her shoulder and leading me back to the other room, where the light breathing of my sisters filled the air. She pushed me down on the narrow bed and draped an old sarong across me.

"That's better, Eshlaini. That's it, now. Sleep."

I did sleep, but not deeply and with many dreams. When I woke up the house, though very dark, was alive with movement and urgent, whispered voices. The door to my mother's room was slightly open. I could see my father sitting by the bed, my mother's hand in his. He was praying. I was only nine, too young to understand the words, but I remembered them from other deaths, I knew the portent of those sounds.

All that followed is no longer very clear. The words rained down around me, and suddenly I was standing up, illuminated with an idea of how to save my mother. I remember that the floor felt cool against my bare feet, that moonlight came in through the window and lit the crib where my two sisters slept. Their mouths moved, even in sleep, and their hands and feet jerked sometimes with the motions of the womb. In the sudden silence from my mother's room I reached for a thick pillow and placed it above the sleeping faces of my sisters. I was nine years old, with a literal mind, and I remembered the midwife's words. If these twins would cost my mother her life, then I reasoned I could save her if they died.

There is no way to know, now, what might have happened. I might have carried through, possessed as I was with the madness of loss, with the misguided logic of an egocentric child. But I was not an evil girl, or truly demented, and it's just as possible that I would have stopped. It's possible that, hovering above my sisters, I would have broken down, retrieved the pillow and sobbed into the feathers. I can't know, now, which would have happened, and it no longer matters. For my father found me in that moment of intent. He appeared in the doorway quite suddenly, silhouetted by the terrible and

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empty light of my mother's room. He gave a roar so loud it froze the scene forever in our histories. It called my brothers forth; they tumbled into the room like birds spilled from a nest. They were witness to the blow my father gave me, the punch of a grown man inflated with wild fury against a death he was powerless to stop. And they were there to hear it when he gave me, finally, the name I would carry through my life.

"Take this one," he said, pushing me across to the oldest boy, the brother who was said to resemble the soldier. "Take her and lock her in her room. She has gone mad, like her grandmother before her. Rohila." He spat the name out like poison. "This evil girl, she is Rohila once again."

Rohila. It was a name we all knew, but rarely spoke. She was my father's mother, at one time young and lovely, known for both her beauty and her skill at sewing. Brides sought her out, and rich girls, and she sat night by night in the lamplight, her needle flashing like a minnow in the dark. Her own clothes were so elegant and graceful that she drew the eyes of every man. It is said that when she finally married, another girl was so distraught that she cast some black magic on Rohila. No one could have guessed this, for at first Rohila and her husband were very happy. It was only later that people remembered how she was plagued that year with headaches and strange dreams. Soon she was pregnant, but from the beginning there was something wrong. Rohila grew round without growing plump, and it is said that there was a nervousness about her, a kind of tightness that showed around her eyes.

Everyone knows about the fevers that can follow childbirth, the precautions that must be taken to prevent them. It was not Rohila's fault that the midwife was unskilled, or forgetful, jealous or enchanted. It was not her fault that the herbs were not prepared, that the offering went unmade, so that after the birth of her first and only

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child my grandmother fell into a temporary madness. They found her standing on a bridge with the baby, my father, in her arms, ready to drop him into the creek. After that she was cast away by her husband in favor of another wife, the woman of sweet pastries, the woman I knew as grandmother. Rohila was sent home, to live in isolation. She tended to her aging parents; when they died she went to help her brothers and their wives. I saw her once, a bent old woman who shuffled away from children, who gave us bad dreams. Aside from this I know nothing at all, though sometimes now I imagine that I understand her life.

For, in the way of our name legacies, her life became mine. I was only a child, but on the day my sisters were born and my mother died, my destiny was fixed. I became Rohila, the one who would not marry, the one who would remain at home to care for my brothers and, in his old age, my father. It was not spoken, but simply understood. Ask my family about the justice of it all, and they would have looked up surprised, they would have called it fate. They, named for the strong and sane and famous, could afford to believe in the preordained. If everything was destiny, then it was not their responsibility to intervene. And yet there was a truth I soon discovered that they never paused to think about. If I was to be an old maid, chained forever to that house, then this was also true: it was my father's will that made it so. It was his decree, his choice.

What is destiny, and what is in the power of the individual? By seventeen I was strong but petite, with long slender limbs, and wrists and ankles as delicate as bone. I learned quickly that the body is one destiny. No one who saw me would have guessed my fate within that house. The young men, watching me walking to and from my school, their eyes lingering on my skin like the warm light of sunset, none of them guessed. They followed me, slipped notes into my books that spoke of love

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and the future, of other lives. I should have been smart enough to see these for what they were, a lure connected to the hook of another predetermined life. I should have remembered my mother, turning her head away when the midwife warned her to make a choice she didn't have. But I was young and foolish, and those notes in my pockets were as light and persistent as hope. I smiled shyly at the young men, blushed becomingly, and soon they began appearing at my house, hoping to gain my father's permission to marry me.

On the night the first young man came, I stood at the upstairs window and watched him ring the bell. I had his note promising to win me, and I had a wild joy in my heart. I thought my father would reconsider. After all, no one wanted an unmarriageable daughter. My suitor had dressed very carefully, his hair had been combed with water until it looked polished. When he disappeared inside the house, I waited to be summoned.

Time passed slowly for me then. Still, not half an hour was gone when I heard the door slam, when I ran to the window to see that young man walking quickly to the road. The next day I looked for him, desperate to know what had happened, but although I saw him from a distance, across the classroom or the playing field, he never spoke to me again.

What had my father said and why? I thought perhaps he'd found the young man unsuitable; he was, after all, a famous and important man, and choosy about his in-laws. Which is why I was careful about the other notes I had, and finally chose one from another young man who was not in our school at all, but an officer in the army and stationed near our house. Wasn't my oldest brother also an officer in the army? My father must approve. After some time had passed, after a flurry of notes and shy glances, this man too approached my father's house. This time I left nothing to chance. I crouched beneath the window of my father's study, and listened.

"But I worry," my father said, tapping his pipe out in

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the ashtray. My young officer was seated across from him, hat in his hands, hope on his face. "I worry about this madness she has shown, and what might happen if there were children. You know, my daughter is not quite right. No doubt you've heard the stories—she nearly killed her two sisters when they were only infants. Even now I see her at the park sometimes, watching the children. Her eyes are quite unnatural then, the way the were that long-ago night. We keep a careful watch on her, you see."

"I had no idea," the young man said. There was trouble in his voice. I wanted to jump up, shout out loud, for what my father said about the park, about the children, was not true. Those children held no interest for me. Even the night my sisters were born seemed like a dream, like a story that had happened to another girl.

"If I were less honest," my father went on, "I'd let you go ahead and marry my daughter. But I can't condemn a young man like you to the uncertain life my daughter would offer. You need a strong woman, someone to support you. My daughter will spend her life in this house, as it has been willed. When I die, of course, this place will become hers. I've prayed on this, for guidance, and I'm sure that it is so."

The night was warm, yet as he spoke I was shivering on the porch, shaking so hard I had to tuck my hands within my armpits to keep my fingers from knocking on the wall. For I could understand the meaning of this night. My father was driving my suitors away, not for their sake, but for his own. He wanted to ensure himself a peaceful old age, someone here to care for him. I, Eshlaini, was to be the one. This was no divine destiny, but my father's will. The young man was standing up to leave, shaking my father's hand, expressing his thanks, and the sight impelled me to do what for years I had believed was an impossible thing. I stood up in that window and I spoke against my father.

"It is not true, what my father is telling you," I said.

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Both men turned to me, shock on their faces. It was the young man I looked at first. I was so exhilarated at my own boldness, the blood pulsing in my heart, that I expected the same from him. I suppose I thought that he would take my hand and run with me out into the night, but instead he averted his eyes at once. I watched him for a moment, my blood pulse slowing with anger first, then with humiliation. He stared at the wall, a muscle twitching in his cheek. It was my father who finally spoke, in the gentle voice one uses on children and the mad.

"Rohila," he said. "This is not for you to decide. Go to your room at once." The young man turned away. He would not look at me, or speak.

"Rohila," my father repeated, but I interrupted him.

"I have been listening," I said. I knew that I probably looked half-mad, my hair flying around my head, my face streaked with tears, my voice in a shrill pitch. "I heard you promise me the house. If you will not let me marry, father, then at least do this: add my name to your will with this man as your witness. Ensure me that my future will be as you have decreed."

"It is not I who have decreed this," my father said. But he looked at me so strangely, as if it was the first time he had ever seen me clearly. Then he shrugged. "Nevertheless, it is a small thing. This is the least valuable of my properties, and it will only take a moment to add it to the will."

That night I sat up in my room for a long time, the paper in my hand. It was my true name they had used, my legal name, to will this house to me. Though the house was small, worth very little, and though I knew I would never have another suitor, a strange satisfaction mingled with my anger. I had this paper, after all, with my true name. I knew the small victory I had won.

What happens to an anger, so fierce it burns the inner eyelids with a white light, when it goes too long unexpressed? I can tell you—it turns into a black nut, a bilious

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knot in the gut, a dark coiled seed. I could feel it every day, tending to my father's needs, the years of my own life passing one by one. At night I sat before the mirror, scanning the new wrinkles where none had been, clipping at the hairs that sprouted on my chin. I dreamed of leaving, but in those days there was no place a woman alone could go. I was tied to the house by the great chains of past and present circumstance. My anger leaked out in strange ways. Sometimes I broke things, secretly, that he would not notice missing for months—a small vase from my mother, the fountain pen from some famous general. I buried his medals in the back yard. At times it seemed that I was mad, as he claimed, but I had only to press my fingers against my stomach to reassure myself about the truth. That was where the anger had settled, tense as a muscle. I could feel it there, hard-skinned, thick as a chestnut.

One day, after years had passed, I saw that my father was going to die. He was in his eighties, trim and to all appearances healthy, but that morning I noticed the tremor in his fingers as he ate his breakfast rice, and when he signed the letters I had typed his hand was shaking so badly that I could not read his name. He resisted doctors for the longest time, but when he finally went they confirmed what I had guessed long before: he had a year, or less, to live.

On that day the dark seed sprang open. I felt it releasing, the sap of it running through my veins. As each day passed and my father grew weaker, new shoots made their way through my arms and legs. I felt myself growing alive from within. When I held my father's elbow to assist him to the porch, when he took more and more frequently to his bed, I felt leaves unfurling, inner flowers blooming in my fingertips and cheeks. By the time he was bedridden it was nearly complete, a new self about to be born. I hummed as I cared for him, swabbing the loose flesh of his legs, arranging the sheets.

I began to speak to him too, though I had been a silent

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girl, curled quietly around my anger. Cancer had eaten through his voice box and so he could not answer me when I told him what it was I planned to do with that house he had left me. His eyes followed me around the room as I opened windows, dusted the fan, poured water from a glass pitcher and held it to his lips. One day I told him I would burn it down, sending the blue flames high above the trees, curling the walls and furniture into nothing more than ash. Another time I told him I would rent it to people from a different faith, people who would cook pork in the kitchen, keep dogs to wander freely from room to room. A house of illicit women, I murmured, arranging his pillows, with lovers stepping in and out and sighs of passion floating from every room. I stood up, as if struck with an idea, and said I might even bring a lover here myself.

My father made a noise deep in his throat, and I looked down. He was speaking without sound, his lips moving in exaggerated motions, easy to read.

"Rohila," he was saying. "No more. Don't."

"Rohila's dead," I told him briskly, pressing a damp cloth first against one cheek, than another. "She's been dead for decades, you ought to know that."

There was a pause, then his hand against my sleeve again. I looked down. He struggled with the words, and I felt a bright tingling just beneath my skin.

"What was that?" I asked, though of course I had seen it. "Say it again?"

His lips trembled, his flesh shaped my name.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Eshlaini."

Roots shot to my toes, took permanent hold. It was only my name, yet to me it was like a flash of the sun, a trigger for the quick photosynthesis of joy.

Flesh is the only destiny. In the end that's all I will concede to fate. My father lived his life as a powerful man, but even he could not die as he would have wished, quickly and with dignity. Instead he went with agonizing

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slowness, rotting from the inside out. It was not merciful, the way his body went before his mind did. Toward the end I discovered maggots living in the soft flesh around his few remaining teeth, and I had to watch his eyes, still knowing, while I plucked them out and swabbed his gums with antiseptic cream. Days later he burned with fever, his fingers like smoking sticks in my palm. He seemed to shrink before my eyes, his skin going tight and hard around his bones. He toughened, became nutlike. Though I bathed him with lightly scented water, though I pressed cool cloths against the pulsing heat of his forehead, I could not stop the transformation that was taking place. He shrank within himself, and his skin clung to the new shape. It was days and days before I understood. There he was, his skin gone rough and dark, his body coiled. I stared at him in recognition, then. He was the dark seed I had discarded.

As he lay dying the family came. On planes, by car and train, from the distant foreign cities and the nearby villages, all came. They pressed my hands when they entered the house, they touched their fingers to their hearts and mouths in gestures of intimacy and love, but they did not see the transformation that had taken place, they did not look me in the eyes to notice.

What drew their attention was the will, and most especially the codicil that left the house to me.

Of course they knew about the promise, made twenty years ago to seal my fate. Twenty years ago, when mosquitos clouded the dark rooms of that house, and the jungle rose up like a mystery behind it. No one wanted that house then, the least valuable of my father's properties, and so it was an easy promise. I, Eshlaini, would be made to give my life, and in return I would be guaranteed a house.

Twenty years ago. No one imagined then that the city would expand, pressing outward like a deep breath, to make this the most valuable land my father owned. This land, sold now, would make us all rich beyond belief.

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Before his death I heard them discussing this, in twos or threes. Carrying my father's bedpan, lifting him from the sheets to clean his sores, I heard the whispers coming from the bottom of the stairs, from around the corner. They could not take it from me, but they wanted it, and this was the most surprising thing of all: I could see on their faces, turned so kindly toward me, that they thought I would give it to them without a fight.

After my father died, there was a family meeting. The will was read out loud then, and discussed. Finally my eldest brother, named for the soldier, turned to me. He was tall, like my father, with the same balding head.

"Rohila," he said. "The house is yours, as was once promised, though we can't imagine that you want it. It is so big, after all, hardly suitable for a woman alone. I would like to offer you a place in my own home, comfort and family for life. In return, of course, you would sign over the house to the general estate our father left."

He paused, and all the faces turned toward me. I felt the pressure of their eyes, and another pressure too. The idea of destiny is not an easy thing to shrug away. I knew it would be easier not to fight. I knew it would be easier to follow the path they had determined.

"You're right," I said. "I do not want this house."

I paused just long enough to see relief relax them. My eldest brother smiled. They began to turn to each other, putting me back in my shadowy place, but before they went too far I spoke again.

"I do not want the house. Nonetheless, I intend to keep it."

Words have power. I knew that from my father. Still, I watched with some surprise as what I had said rippled visibly through their faces. My eldest brother stepped forward and took my hands. Though it was said that he took after our great-uncle, in truth it is my father he resembles. I looked into his face, his expression so gentle, so concerned with my own good, and I saw the face of my father twenty years ago, when I was seventeen.

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"Dear Rohila," he said. "You've had a shock. I'm sure you'll want to reconsider."

"Jamaluddin," I answered, slipping my hands from his, noting his surprise at the use of his dusty given name. "My father pledged this house to me. It was his dying wish. How can I, then, deny it?"

Jamaluddin shook his head. "We'd thought you'd live with one of us," he said. "We'll see to your future, no need to worry over that, Rohila."

"My name is Eshlaini," I told him.

It was only then that they noticed how I'd changed, the scent of new, insistent life rising from my skin, hair flowing out like a sea anemone. They stepped back from me when I passed them, their eyes followed me as I walked from the room. Later I heard them discussing their options, legal and otherwise, but in the end the will held. It was destiny, I told them, smiling. There was nothing they could do.

When I sold that house I became a rich woman, but I live a simple life. I have a small apartment in the city, a few pieces of furniture, a brand-new car. And clothes—I threw out all my ragged sarongs, the little-girl and old-maid dresses I had accumulated over the years. In their place I bought the crisp tailored clothes I had admired in magazines, and as a tribute to my mother and my grandmother I wear bright scarves and jewelry, stones and precious metals that glisten in the dusk like tiny stars, or a sewing needle flashing.

I think perhaps it was the bright colors, the glimmer of my jewels, that drew the little girl to me. She is from the orphanage around the corner from my apartment. I used to see her every day, kicking a *takraw* ball around the dusty, empty field, or playing jump rope with a group of other girls. She is a serious child, friendly but self-contained. One day she waved to me, and after that I found myself looking for her when I passed, found my-

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self disappointed if a day went by without her quick eyes, her bright triangle of a face, there to greet me. I began to think of her, to wonder what had put her there, what stories she was hearing about the choices fate had left her. I began to think of ways to help her—a scholarship, new clothes, a bicycle. And then one day I had another thought.

Why not a daughter of my own? Why not?

My father's house is gone now. I watched them tear it down, the machine taking large bites out of the rooms I had scrubbed so many times, the rooms that had held so much unhappiness and death. It was a relief to me, finally, when nothing remained. I find it fascinating to watch the process they follow to make these new high-rises, the steel girders and poured concrete, the bamboo scaffolding alive with workers. These workers know it used to be my father's house that stood here, and sometimes they take me inside and show me what they're doing. I nod, impressed, listening to the echo of my footsteps in so many layers of empty space.

Tonight it's dusk, and the air is spilling over with sweetness from the flowers. I sit in the car, watching the workers move in the bright pools of light, thinking of the daughter who will come to live with me next week. I've prepared her room—new paint, a few toys—but I've kept it simple. She'll fill it up herself, soon enough, with things that are her own. I like to think of that, my house filling up with the unexpected. In the same way, it pleases me to think of the new lives that will soon occupy this space. Hundreds of people will live here, and they will have no connection whatsoever with my future or my past.

One by one the lights go out, the workers leave, and finally the last light flickers off and returns this building to the night. I start my car, then, and pull out into traffic. It's a clear night, full of stars, and I wonder for a moment

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which one of them my mother looked at on the day I was born. No destiny in that, only a bright wish, a continuity of light to light. Look at me now, hands on a wheel, driving myself to a place where no one else has lived, where only the future lies waiting. I am that light. I have no other destiny. I am Eshlaini, and history ends with me.

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Kenneth Koch

On Aesthetics

Aesthetics of Creating Light

Put one hand
Next to a light-switch
With the other hand
Feeling for the wall.

Aesthetics of Standing Up

Keep one foot
On the floor
At the same time keeping
The other foot firmly at its side.
Then stand.

Aesthetics of Being a Bird

Eat brusquely
With a half-closed mouth;
When another speaks, glance up
But don't respond.
After you have eaten
Take off
And sing
Portuguese songs—a fado, if you please!

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Aesthetics of Taking a Walk

You
Put
One
Foot
In
Front
Of
The
Other.

Aesthetics of Harshness to a Horse

You should never be harsh
To a horse. A horse is always doing
Its best. Otherwise it is a bad horse
And harshness has no effect.

Aesthetics of Climbing

Take time
To sit down
On the slope
And read
Something
About
Gasping.

Aesthetics of Baby

Seat yourself on the floor
Bend your trunk forward
Head outstretched with hands reaching
And crawl.

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Aesthetics of Watching Waves

Read André Gide
As you watch the waves.
His prose, his prose style
Its even and variable tone.

Aesthetics of Avant-Garde Theater

Make the stage an actor
Make an actor the stage.

Aesthetics of Theater

After all
You need the women
With their snide looks
And they needed the men
With their pride in hooks
That could drag a hen
From the royal estate Park
To the quarry at Gercy
And back again.

Aesthetics of Being with Child

You have the kid
Within what hid
That once did serve
Some lesser curve

So shall the wit
Of having it
Be inly lit
By white by light of day.

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Aesthetics of Friendship

A world without friendship
Is a world without forms.

Aesthetics of Other Languages

A young woman without a word
Of English to her vocabulary
Sang like a bird
To a Huguenot student in the moss of February.

Aesthetics of Generosity

Give love as a gift
But use your brain.

Aesthetics of Waking Up

Close one eye
After the other.
Whisper "Good-bye!"
To the Unconscious.

Aesthetics of Being Elephants

When the elephants came to town
The dry-cleaning establishments came with them.

Aesthetics of Being the Youngest of Four Sisters

Take a day off
While your sisters are working

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Work on a day
When your sisters are taking off
Be bright in the kitchen
Be sullen in the pantry
When they listen to music, cough
When they go to their lovers, be sultry
There is no solution
To being the youngest sister
The hottest summer day
To you is the most wintry
Take your shirt off
And read a while.

Aesthetics of Bears

To be a bear, be active
In the bear world—
Fur, limbs, and claws.
Rampage. Stay. Mate.
Give birth to another bear.

Aesthetics of Avoiding Fear

Listen to the bell
For twenty-five minutes
Before you go down
To answer the door.
If someone is still there,
Sing him a fado
That says If I love you
You can do me no harm.

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Aesthetics of Pearls

Pearls on a necklace
Are not anything
Compared to pearls
In a late fourth-century Greek frieze.

Aesthetics of Air

Serafina said *E bello avere*
Nell'appartamento un po
Di natura meaning the window
That let in the sky

Aesthetics of Verlaine and Rimbaud

De la musique avant toute chose—Happiness
From which no one gets away.

Aesthetics of the Man in the Moon

To be the man in the moon
You have to be sunny.

Aesthetics of Victor Hugo

Place the Poet in the valleys
Place the Poet in the hills
Let the hills and the valleys
Know that the Poet is there.

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Aesthetics of the Little House

The little house in Italy
Looks good in ports.

Aesthetics of Obituary

To avoid the clichés
Of the obituary writers,
Die in obscurity.
A fine bed in a light-filled room
Someone who adores you is at your side
And vowed to silence.

Aesthetics of a Family Picnic

Take a basket
Of food and drink
And two children
(Aged five and three),
With your husband, the painter,
As close as you can get
To the sea.

Aesthetics of Mozart

At the beginning of the opera
Everything is clarified
By theme, while at the end
None of these themes is really clear
Except to the ear.

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Aesthetics of Snowplow

Snowplow with good reason
Sits idle most of the time
Otherwise there would be no snow.

Aesthetics of Climbing Stairs

With a carpet in the middle
With friends,
With the certainty of love

O friends
O certainty of love!

Aesthetics of Paul Valéry

Better a single line that I have worked on
Than a whole epic dictated by the Muse!
Better to walk, even lost, in my own direction—and
find the way.
If not . . . not count the day.

Aesthetics of Being a Sailboat

Go this way and that
Have a reflection
Be upside down

Aesthetics of Conservative Hats

Fit on the head
Of someone instead
Of being thrown in the ring.

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Aesthetics of Other Women

They are general and ephemeral;
Your quarrels are engraved in stone.

Aesthetics of Clouds

Sometimes be red
As Lipstick Number Two;
At others pink
As Corinne on the brink
Of loving you, and saying so,
And also sometimes white
As news at night.

Aesthetics of Greek Night

In the Greek night
The statues
Of Athena and of Apollo
Are no longer white
But painted
In many colors
As they used to be
Two thousand years ago.

Aesthetics of Being Geese

It is always rush hour
When you are honking.

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Aesthetics of Creating Time

To create time
Relinquish space—that is, the place
Where the time used to be.

Aesthetics of a Saving Grace

The saving grace of Rembrandt
Is not in his painting of folds.

Aesthetics of Echo

Echo was Us
A nymph who lived in Din
Every cliff If

Aesthetics of Civilization

Every dog has the whiff of civilization.
A priest plays ball in the street
With some schoolboys. The overworked chambermaid
Smiles like a duchess.
Even a beggar is addressed as *Monsieur* or *Madame*.

Aesthetics of Plato

There has to be something better
Than what we see. Otherwise, we'd see it.

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Aesthetics of Being a Baseball

Go as fast as you can
In whatever direction.

Aesthetics of the Bus

When the bus glides
Numerous are transported
From Montparnasse's sunny side
To Neuilly then over the Seine
Again five kilometers into the night
End of the section and station

Aesthetics of a Convulsion

André Breton said Beauty
Must be convulsive
Or it will not exist
At all. List five
Beautiful convulsions:
Mount Aetna's, Mount
Vesuvius's, Oscar
Wilde's, Gladstone's,
Petrarch's.

Aesthetics of Hallowe'en

Don't cover your mask up
With your hat.

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Aesthetics of Loving an Aztec

Be careful of your heart
Or the Aztec will rip it out.

Aesthetics of Cezanne

To have painted
The apples
That were in
The orchard
So red
And so gold

Aesthetics of Small Theater

Don't bring a horse
Into a small theater
But, if you must,
Put it on stage.

Aesthetics of Surrealism

To find the impossible
With breasts.

Aesthetics of Rough Art

Smash smudge and erase
So that the true lovely face
Will emerge or maybe will not
But at least you've given it a shot
Somehow characteristic of the age.

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Aesthetics of Running

Go
As
Fast
As
You
Can.
Then
You
Are
Running!

Aesthetics of History

Paris makes me happy—
Maybe it is something else
Maybe there is something in me
That responds to the bubbling history
Of the capital of the Kings of France,
Capitale de la Douleur
Paul Eluard said.

Aesthetics of Multiplicity of Aesthetics (in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*)

In the *Birth of Venus*, these are some
Of the aesthetics to consider: the aesthetics of shape,
Of line, of color, of contrast, of shadow, of sea,
of clouds, of sky,
Of filmy drapery, of cherubs, of angels, of sunlight,
Of waves, of water, of posture, of hair, of hairdo,
Of wind, of breeze, of puffed cheeks, of the
marvelous,
Of realism, of mythology, of paganism, of antiquity,
of seeing,

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Of allegory, of perfection, of the "exact moment," of seashells,
Of shoulders, of eyes, of gazing, of breasts, of waists, of feet—
For each of these one has an ideal conception
Whether conscious or unconscious, and when one sees
The *Birth of Venus* one is moved by, and may think about, these things.

Aesthetics of Feet

To move together
Even when apart.

Aesthetics of After the Opera

When the singing has stopped
The silence of the singing begins
If you are the opera.

Aesthetics of Ghosts

Place a white sheet
Over the bureau
Cut two holes
Near the top of the heap
Open the door and the window
To create a breeze
To make the sheet rustle and blow.

Aesthetics of Dante

Invite your best friends
To go out with you in a boat

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That's magic and can go anywhere
And sail and talk, and talk and sail,
Until you find Beatrice
Like an endangered species
With luminous antlers
Rising through the medieval dark.

Aesthetics of Cavalcanti Grieving for Lost Love

Be like a dead person, who seems to those
Who see him a man
Made of branches or stone
Who is able to walk only as a result of cunning
And who has in his heart a wound
Which is, since he is dead,
A visible sign.

Aesthetics of Creating Something

This doesn't just happen:
It happens to you.

Aesthetics of Chinese Opera

The Chinese opera was dealing with what a brain
Has to deal with only part of the time: the excesses
and fantasies of kings.

Aesthetics of Noah's Ark

Every animal needs a mate
Under Ark conditions; its bar is a dark, dull place.

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Aesthetics of Paul Klee

Little bits of freedom
Imprisoned by light blue sound
Is, it may be, an "oversensitive" way
Of thinking about Paul Klee
For whom smallness relayed a message
To the German-Swiss mountains around

Aesthetics of Ronsard

Try to meet
A girl of fourteen
Cassandre Salviati
At Blois
Then never see
Her again
Now write
And write and write
Until you become
An old intellectual bum
Philosopher, aesthetician,
Leader of a school,
Monsieur Ronsard
Doctor of the Pléiade.

Aesthetics of Lorca

Federico Garcia Lorca stands alone
Luna, typewriter, plantain tree, and dust
The moon is watching him. It is watching over him.

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Aesthetics of Being in Haiti

Don't take off
With a Zombie
On a barge
In the heavy rain.

Aesthetics of the Novel

Put one plot
Inside another.

Aesthetics of Hill Town

Put the cathedral
Or the church
That has the "scheming
Look of an ex-cathedral"
Ronald Firbank's phrase
On top of this hill.

Aesthetics of Feeling Fine

Feel fine
Then go away.

Aesthetics of Difference

What a difference
When the words
Come tangled
In contradictions!

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Aesthetics of Being a Box

Look forward to always containing
What is contained
Whether it is dry
Or raining. Then one morning early
Someone may come by
(This has been known to happen)
Who will take
Your top off! and they will say
Thus, thus! was this result obtained.

Aesthetics of Opera

Don't sing an aria
To someone who can't
Sing one back.

Aesthetics of *le Grand Malentendu*

Don't be mistaken
About being mistaken
The Divinities are mistaken time after time

Aesthetics of Union Man

"You either are a Union man
Or a thug for J.H. Blair"
"I'm working for the Union"

Aesthetics of Railyard

The smoke of the train
Is rising in a crescent
From the engine still smoking
In the yard.

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Aesthetics of Aristotle

They recognize each other, the one
Who has killed their father, and the other
The one who has killed his son. And she—that
woman,
The wife of both—is their sister. They
Are brothers. After twenty years
Unknown to each other, they meet—they
Recognize each other. It is
The Recognition Scene, the
Core of Aristotle's theory
Of the purgative effect of tragedy—he says we feel
The purgative shock effects most
In watching the Recognition Scene.

Aesthetics of Beijing

Five hundred miles from Shanghai
Where matzo balls become dumplings
And nineteen ninety
Is nineteen thirty-five.

Aesthetics of Right

Right is the aesthetic form
Of good and wrong is the aesthetic form
Of bad. In which case Aesthetics
Is a form (or branch) of Ethics
Which is neither good nor bad.

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Aesthetics of Being a Road (*Hommage à Rilke*)

It is long since you were a lane.
Now you leave off being a street
And don't become a highway yet.
You are cautious
But cautiously exploring what it might be
To be wider than you were before
And go further, and be less familiar with trees.

Aesthetics of Being a Crab

Put one claw
After another.

Aesthetics of Being a Mouse

Look at the floor.
Look up.
Look at the wall.

Aesthetics of Poetry and Prose

Chekhov told Bunin
Not to begin writing
Until he felt as cold as ice
Keats wrote to Shelley
"I am a fever of myself"

Aesthetics of Unanimity

The waves come all at once
When you are a sailboat
And the wind
As when you used to be a tree.

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Aesthetics of Melodrama

The sickness of the evil person is not known,
Nor is the sickness of the good one.
Everyone is merely good—or bad
As in Ronald Reagan's view of Kansas or Leningrad.

Aesthetics of Fiction

Don't write stories
That have no plot
And have no characters
And have no style.

Aesthetics of Integrity

For every star in the sky
Someone is holding his ground.

Aesthetics of Early On

Oh the glove in the fish bowl
Oh the flyers in the sink

Aesthetics of Honfleur

Put one ship
Next to another
—Honfleur

Aesthetics of Instruction

Do this, do that! is not instruction;
Instruction is a plausible bond

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Between one patented enterprise and another.
A song instructs us to be singing;
A house, to live like women and men.

Aesthetics of Overcoats

You are best when you are taken off
By a naked hostess
Surrounded by dandy-looking goats
Already bonkers on the Parian wine.

Aesthetics of Ariosto

Meanwhile someone is going
Another way.

Aesthetics of Branch

To hang over and to stretch out
To bear leaves
And flowers and fruit—
And still be branching.

Aesthetics of Moss

Moss covers
Unwilling things
The way old poetry covers
Unwilling subjects:
The death of kings,
Women lost, spring
Arrives, you take
A flower and place it
In your hair or lie
Beside it in the moss.

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Aesthetics of Robert Musil

Musil saw that life
Was without meaning
While at the same time seeing
That Rilke had perfected
Or even that he had discovered
The lyric poem in German
Before that, it had been nothing
Since the Middle Ages.

Aesthetically one must say
That inside a meaningless whole
Significant particulars exist.
Kicking, passing the ball
And rushing may fill us with life
In even a one-sided game
That is ended by freezing rain.

Aesthetics of Pasternak

Power lines under the earth's crusty surface
You know that part that flowers bloom and lovers lie
on
To him were like love nerves precisely, at the
beginning of a storm

Aesthetics of Saying Good-bye to a Friend

Walk him to the place
Where he can get a taxi
And say good-bye.
If he is wearing
An overcoat
Place one hand
On his shoulder—or if he is not.
Shake hands, embrace

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Your friend and say good-bye.
Soon the sky
Will cover him
With only a plane between.

Aesthetics of Blob

Blob should not come
Out of the closet
Nor seep its head-shape up
From between the boards of the floor.
Blob should be intransigent
Should stay in window
Eschew the darkness
Should be a friend of the sun.

Aesthetics of Resistance

Time can resist the fluff overcoat
But can't resist the fado sung with full and snowy
lungs.

Aesthetics of Comedy Asleep

Don't wake the clown
Or he may knock you down.

Aesthetics of Counter-Sappho

In gold sandals, like a thief,
Sappho fell on dawn.

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Aesthetics of Certain Things

Certain people for certain things.
Certain women for certain things.
Certain men for certain things.
Certain occasions for certain things.
Certain lives for certain things.

Aesthetics of Silence

Silence is not everything.
It is half of everything
Like a house.

Aesthetics of the Main Part of Life

The late early and the entire middle
Are the main part of life. Be as kind
As you can in this part, and get done
What it seems to you has to be done.
If you find time for it, have a good time.

Aesthetics of Cannon

Being near a cannon
When it was firing
Was as exciting
Stendhal said
As writing
What no one had ever said.

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Aesthetics of Plaza

Christ comes down from the cross
Into a plaza.

Aesthetics of Outdoor Opera

Sing as loud
As you can
At the outdoor opera—
It will never
Be loud
Enough.

Aesthetics of Penises

Rising and falling like swans
On Greek vases
Suggesting the connection
To life that Greek men had,
And satyrs and gods.

Aesthetics of Late

Light falls on the fountains
When they are off.

Aesthetics of the Nude

To be a nude
Take off your clothes
And stand
Five or ten feet away
From a painter of nudes.

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Aesthetics of Jazz

Play
One
Note
After
Another
On
The
First
Day
Of
The
First
Year
Of
The
First
Century
Of
Jazz.

Aesthetics of the Aesthetician

What is the aesthetician
But a mule hitched to the times?

Aesthetics of Sunday

Forgetting about Monday
Unlocked from Saturday
Behold new-born
And freshly-filmed Sunday
Now lighting and flashing
Upon the wall.

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Aesthetics of Code

"The sun was as hot
As the top ledge of a steam bath—"
Is Pasternak writing in code?

Aesthetics of Talleyrand

No one has any idea
Of happiness who wasn't alive
Before seventeen eighty-nine.

Aesthetics of Louis Kahn

The sun never knew
How wonderful it was
Until it fell on the wall
Of a building.

Aesthetics of Wading

You
Leave
One
Foot
A
Little
Ways
Behind
The
Other
Foot
Then
Bring
It

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Up
Even
When
You
Wade.

Aesthetics of Beauty and Death

When one sees a beautiful woman
One can assume that somewhere
(Stendhal says) there is a happy man;
On the other hand,
When one sees a gloomy funeral
One can assume that somewhere
There is a woman or a man
Wondering if going on living is worthwhile.
Put the two together: beautiful woman and gloomy funeral
And what do you get? The death
Of Cleopatra and her obsequies.

Aesthetics of Suffering

Suffering comes to people as war comes to countries
And issues are clarified. Others are completely lost.

Aesthetics of Stone

The gods take stone
And turn it into men and women;
Men and women take gods
And turn them into stone.

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Aesthetics of Passing By (After Reverdy)

One shadow—
Enough!
Is passing by.

Aesthetics of the Eye of the Beholder

Beauty is where
It seems
Always to be.

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Beginning with My Streets

Czeslaw Milosz

Dictionary of Wilno Streets (1967)

Why should that city, defenseless and pure as the wedding necklace of a forgotten tribe, keep offering itself to me?

Like blue and red brown seeds beaded in Tuzigoot in the copper desert seven centuries ago.

Where ocher rubbed into stone still waits for the brow and cheekbone it would adorn, though for all that time there has been no one.

What evil in me, what pity, has made me deserve this offering?

It stands before me, ready, not even the smoke from one chimney is lacking, not one echo, when I step across the rivers that separate us.

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Perhaps Anna and Dora Drużyno have called to me, three hundred miles inside Arizona, because except for me no one else knows that they ever lived.

They trot before me on Embankment Street, two gently born parakeets from Samogitia, and at night they unravel their spinster tresses of gray hair.

Here there is no earlier and no later; the seasons of the year and of the day are simultaneous.

At dawn shit wagons leave town in long rows and municipal employees at the gate collect the turnpike toll in leather bags.

Rattling their wheels, *Courier* and *Speedy* move against the current to Werki, and an oarsman shot down over England skiffs past, spread-eagled by his oars.

At St. Peter and Paul's the angels lower their thick eyelids in a smile over a nun who has indecent thoughts.

Bearded, in a wig, Mrs. Sora Kłok sits at the counter, instructing her twelve shop girls.

And all of German Street tosses into the air unfurled bolts of fabric, preparing itself for death and the conquest of Jerusalem.

Black and princely, an underground river knocks at cellars of the cathedral under the tomb of St. Casimir the Young and under the half-charred oak logs in the hearth.

Carrying her servant's basket on her shoulder, Barbara, dressed in mourning, returns from the Lithuanian Mass at St. Nicholas to the Romers's house on Bakszta Street.

How it glitters! the snow on Three Crosses Hill and Bekiesz Hill, not to be melted by the breath of these brief lives.

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And what do I know now, when I turn into Arsenal Street and open my eyes once more on a useless end of the world?

I was running, as the silks rustled, through room after room without stopping, for I believed in the existence of a last door.

But the shape of lips and an apple and a flower pinned to a dress were all that one was permitted to know and take away.

The Earth, neither compassionate nor evil, neither beautiful nor atrocious, persisted, innocent, open to pain and desire.

And the gift was useless, if, later on, in the flarings of distant nights, there was not less bitterness but more.

If I cannot so exhaust my life and their life that the bygone crying is transformed, at last, into a harmony.

Like a *Noble Jan Dęboróg* in the Straszun's secondhand bookshop, I am put to rest forever between two familiar names.

The castle tower above the leafy tumulus grows small and there is still a hardly audible—is it Mozart's *Requiem?*—music.

In the immobile light I move my lips and perhaps I am even glad not to find the desired word.

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Antokol

First one passed the dock. Iron barriers along the sidewalk polished to a shine by the touch of hands; you could lean against them, or sit, and watch. If I am to speak now about what one could see there, I should first explain that I am there simultaneously as a small boy, an adolescent and a young man, so that many years of watching are concentrated in a single moment. So, what one saw first of all was a boat preparing for departure, or, rather, the public boarding by means of a gangplank, the pressing of fingers into ears as the whistle sounds once and then again, the untying of the ropes with Józiuk shouting at Antuk and Antuk at Józiuk; or, a boat approaching, still far away when the shimmering of its wheels is first discerned. The boats were named *Courier,* possibly *Express* (although I am not sure about that); later on there was a third one, *Speedy,* a wonderful boat, with a real deck. A lot depended on which one you happened to take during school outings to Werki. They went upstream, to Werki and even farther, to Niemenczyn—never downstream. There was also a dock for the small boats that were painted with stripes of many colors along their sides, from the slightly elevated prow to the stern. The ferryman would seat five or six people and cross over to the other shore, to the Pióromont district, using a long oar, also painted, punting, unless the water, in spring or late autumn, was high. One also watched the "flats" floating by, long trains of floating timber, mainly pine, with a hut and a fire on the last raft, which also had an enormously long and heavy steering oar. The sawmills where the "flats" tied up, so that sometimes the Wilia would be completely covered by them, were somewhat farther downstream, past the Green Bridge, across from St. Jacob's.

I also knew larger boats—they were on the Niemen, not the Wilia—from my visits to Kaunas. Almost like illustrations in travel books, they had decks loaded with

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crates and barrels; sometimes, there were cows and horses, too. They went to distant places, as far as Jurbork. To tell the truth, the one I used to take was not large, because it went up the Niemen for only part of its route, to the mouth of the Niewiaża, and then it sailed up the Niewiaża to the town of Bobty. The Niewiaża is quite deep but very narrow and tortuous; it is navigable to that point, but not farther upstream. For some reason, I thought of the local boats as something official, like the post office, and I was surprised that their crews spoke among themselves in exactly the same sort of Polish as the crews of the *Speedy* and the *Courier*.

One always walked past the dock on the way to Antokol; that is why I'm speaking of it now. Then the bridge, or, rather, the bridge across the Wilenka where it flows into the Wilia. Antokol itself is, first of all, the boredom of a long, only partly built-up street, a muscular memory, in the legs, about a space "in between": between the Wilia on the left and the hills on the right. Only the slopes of Castle Hill, in the angle formed by the Wilia and the Wilenka, were luxuriantly green, with the foliage of a deciduous forest. Three Crosses Hill and the other hills were sandy inclines sparsely dotted with pines. We often went climbing there, for the view and the solitude, but basically it was too windswept a place and the somewhat more distant, hilly Antokol, beyond St. Peter and Paul's, was more interesting. I knew the baroque statues of that church from photographs, and even from the postage stamps of Central Lithuania, but when I toured the interior I was disenchanted: a host of details obscured by whitewash, details so minuscule that they could be seen only with a magnifying glass. Beyond the church deeply rutted, sandy roads wound through the forest; they had street names: Sunshine, Springtime, Forest, with a few wooden houses concealed in the thickets, more like dachas than villas. In one of them lived Leopold Pac-Pomarnacki, my schoolmate and partner in my naturalist's passions: a phlegmatic elderly gentleman with

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a protruding belly, fourteen years of age. I was in awe of his collections of rare ornithological books and stuffed birds. An only child, the son of rather elderly parents, I think, he had his very own shotguns. An expedition with him to the country, to visit Nowicki, another schoolmate, whose face I remember but not his first name, remains in my memory as something exceptionally enigmatic, a tormenting darkness from which I am able to retrieve only one or another fragment that immediately disappears. It took place on All Souls' Day, somewhere on the southern boundary of the Rudnicka Wilderness, because it seems we got off the train at Stasiły, beyond Jaszuny. Frozen earth, sunsets and sunrises that mixed reds and blues, hoarfrost, a hamlet, fried blini at dawn, conversations in Belorussian, hunting, and staying by ourselves in a house that was, I think, the residuary part of an estate. There were four of us, one a girl, a student at a Wilno gymnasium or technical school—her black eyes, pallor, throaty laugh (but I have no image of her face), and although Pac and I were complete outsiders here, Nowicki and she kept getting into ominous erotic brawls that excluded me, a mere puppy, from their partnership. During that same school year, in early spring, she was found dead in Zakret, in the German military cemetery—it was suicide, poison or a revolver, but not connected with Nowicki.

Next to St. Peter and Paul's there were also some trails leading up to the ski slopes. An absolutely undeveloped highland, called Antokol Grove and Altaria on the city maps, extended all the way to the outskirts of Zarzecze and Belmont; the runs were mostly short and headlong. I skied like a cow, but, for a brief period at the beginning of my university career and my ardent participation in the Vagabonds' Club, I did so stubbornly. It was the period of my friendship with Robespierre, who used to ski wearing a red flannel shirt, so for me the snow of the Antokol hills is fused with that shirt in a single image. But I remember the outskirts of Antokol, where the city ended and the highway to Niemenczyn began, because that is where as a child I observed the panic of the 1920 retreat.

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Nevertheless, Antokol remains for me not so much streets which one walks on as a shore along which one sails: just beyond the bridge on the Wilenka were the rowing clubs, among them the *AZS* (Academic Sport Union), from whose landing we would push off in a kayak or canoe. The Wilia is a swift river and though we paddled energetically against the current we could only glide quite slowly along the Antokol shore. Across from the *AZS*, on the opposite shore of the Wilia, was Pronaszko's *Mickiewicz*, a gigantic cubist bloated figure, exiled there by the town fathers, who were probably right not to want to place it in the center of town among the old stones.[1] There too, all of a sudden, was the first sandy beach: Tuskulany. We were drawn to more distant places, so I was at that beach only once, while I was still a high school student playing hooky. It happens that, for no obvious reason, particular hours in my life have been preserved with absolute clarity about their details, so I can see the naked people lying there beside me. One of them is a future electrical engineer and officer in the Royal Air Force: Staś. Many years later (it is painful to count them), in 1967, the two of us camped on the shores of big Eagle Lake in the California Sierras, and when we headed straight from our tent to the water the moment we woke up, or went kayaking along its wild forested shores, we didn't look the way we did in Tuskulany, yet it was difficult for me to grasp how our bodies had changed—only perhaps that his wedge-shaped, Russian czar's beard had begun to turn gray.

In the names of the settlements along the Wilia one could discover amalgams of familiar and foreign words. Tuskulany, I assume, was named by enlightened readers of Latin literature, who perceived similarities between this region and Tusculum, the country retreat of wealthy Romans. Wołokumpie is less refined. Trynopol, actually only a white church on a bluff, a sign to oarsmen that they

[1]Zbigniew Pronaszko (1885–1958), painter, sculptor, graphic artist and, for a time, a member of the art faculty at the University of Wilno.

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can relax, because the most treacherous currents are behind them, makes one think of Trinitas, and thus has a derivation similar to that of nearby Kalwaria. Charming forested Werki reminds one of German *Werk,* but according to legend the name is derived from crying eagle chicks—in Lithuanian, *verkti* means to cry.

The Wilia alongside Antokol and all the way to Werki was our city's *freeway,* a word I learned much later, substituting it for the dubiously Polish word *autostrada.* Although I would prefer to say *gościniec*—highroad. So, a highroad, down which the Wilno population would travel on a Sunday outing—the native population that had been living there for generations, which was neither gentry nor working-class, but rather petit bourgeois and thus employed for the most part as artisans. On passenger ships or in small boats, in family groups: shirts, suspenders, taking turns at the oars, the women's colorful dresses and a jar of pickles for a snack. Another popular amusement was the sauna. At the end of the week one could hear all sorts of idiosyncrasies of local speech there, which would have been a treasure for linguists, although I doubt that linguists ever frequent public saunas.

Upstream from Werki, and almost never frequented by people on excursions, the Wilia remained virtually untouched by so-called civilization. I have preserved it in my memory from the point where the Żejmiana emptied into it. Absolute silence, only the splashing of water against the hull, in the sunshine the brilliant whiteness of the steep sandy bluffs with holes drilled into them by cliff swallows, the dangling roots of the pines. Occasionally, a long string of floating log rafts with smoke rising from a stove. There is a particular majesty in the slow turning of these "flats" along the bend of a river. A steering oar in front, a steering oar in back, often plied by two people, a man and a woman, the long train of rafts gliding slowly into a new current. Occasionally a fishing boat would flash by in the other direction, towards the bank; sometimes there would be a naked lad in a kayak, who was

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probably spending his school vacation somewhere nearby, unaware of the devilish traps that history had already set for him.

In the summer the Wilia across from Antokol became shallow; sometimes it was possible to wander downstream for a couple of kilometers, swimming some of the time, but mostly touching the bottom. I associate the Wilia with Antokol because the sawmills beyond the Green Bridge signaled its end as a highroad. Farther on, the river headed for the closed Lithuanian border; besides which, it probably wasn't navigable, considering that in at least one spot it had whirlpools and rapids that were difficult to negotiate. The city's sewage, especially from the hospital in Zwierzyniec, made one loathe to swim in the river near there and also near the opposite shore, by the Zakret forest. Excursions downriver exposed one to an arduous return trip against the current and therefore were rarely organized. We took the train to the settlements of the student union in Legaciszki, which were right on the Lithuanian border.

Arsenal Street

This is a short street, stretching from the corner of Embankment Street, just beside the boat dock, to Cathedral Square. In the olden days, it seems, it was simply the continuation of Antokol Street, its extension. A handful of houses along a single sidewalk; in place of a second sidewalk, the iron curves of a low palisade enclosing a garden (at the rear of the cathedral) that was called the Calf Pen. The corner of Embankment Street was occupied by a large, rather ugly building, the Tyszkiewicz Palace, which was always locked; later on, I learned that it housed the Wróblewski Library; its function derived from the fact that it existed and I never asked myself why. A few years before the war it was taken over to house the Institute for the Study of Eastern Europe and then I often

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had occasion to go to this building. On the other hand, from the time I was in the lowest gymnasium classes I paid regular visits to the house in the middle of Arsenal Street, at No. 6, because my relatives lived there, distant relatives, to be sure: the Pawlikowskis. The blood tie was with her, Cesia Pawlikowska, née Sławińska, I think; she insisted that I call her aunt. The man of the house, Przemysław Pawlikowski, was an ex-colonel of the czarist army; on the walls hung photographs from Bessarabia, where they had lived for a long time and apparently once owned an estate. Tall, swarthy, lean, taciturn, he walked about in a patterned bathrobe, sat on the balcony staring at the green of the garden, or played patience. He also worked on his stamp albums, which tantalized me, because of course I was caught up in this mania and he would give me rare specimens as gifts. Of their two sons, I have no recollection of the first, Danek, who committed suicide as a young man; the second, an engineer, went to Soviet Turkestan after the war to work there as a specialist (a "*spets*"), returned with a Russian wife, bought a car and became one of the first taxi drivers in Wilno, an avant-garde profession—for who ever heard of a well-born man taking tips from a guest? His Russian wife wore Oriental *sharovary* at home and smoked cigarettes in a long cigarette holder. Wacek's sister, Marysia, worked in an office, and so that peaceful family collective (they all lived together) could serve as an illustration of the sociological changes that were taking place at the time. I met Marysia when I was a very young boy because she stayed with my grandfathers for a while in Szetejnie, in Kaunas Lithuania, and it was she who read *With Fire and Sword*[2] to me on the oilcloth couch near the window in the dining room, where you had to curl up in a hollow and guard the spot you had warmed up, not letting your bare feet protrude onto the cold oilcloth beside you.

[2]By Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916). The first novel of a popular trilogy about the seventeenth-century Polish *Respublica*.

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Marysia, as I think the old folks told me, was somewhat "mannered"; for me, she was simply mysterious, introspective, pensive, swaying at the hips, tall; she wore a black velvet ribbon around her white neck. She belonged to the generation that came to maturity on the threshold of the First World War, which is why there were volumes of poetry and literary journals from that period in the house on Arsenal Street. If I had not examined the contents of those shelves, I would never have known, for example, that an almanac, *Żórawce,* was published in 1914 or 1915, filled with poetry and prose of late period Young Poland. In general, my relatives, who were already grown-up young ladies, affected me somewhat erotically in my childhood, furnished me with an insight into an epoch that I could not remember; their style of living itself had preserved something from it. Today it strikes me as laughable to call those times which then were only ten years in the past another epoch, for if those who were familiar with it seemed to me to have emerged from murky darkness, probably a general law was at work: for every generation the events, styles and fashions that are just barely in the past are extremely distant. However, it is impossible to determine if that is always so and if, for example, the 1950s are another geological era for the young people today. Certainly, the First World War and the independence of Poland were a watershed for Marysia and her generation, but not as significant a one as I thought them to be.

Marysia lived an office life, which meant not only work but also friendships, picnics with colleagues, even office excursions abroad. During those years when I used to visit them, first as a gymnasium student, then as a university student, she was beginning to age and I would think about how it is that women become old maids. At 6 Arsenal Street I felt at home, and because it was hard to find a more central location in the city, sometimes I dropped in there simply to stretch out on the sofa. I wrote a couple of poems there that I like to this day. Also,

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I spent my last night in Wilno in that apartment, before my journey, which was more risky than I wanted to admit to myself, to Warsaw across the green border in 1940.[3] This was shortly after the occupation of the city by Soviet troops, which was barely noticed by the family, because Uncle Pawlikowski was dying and their main worry was buying bottles of oxygen.

The Institute for the Study of Eastern Europe, housed in the rebuilt or added-on part of the large corner building, was modernity, lots of light, brightly painted walls, furniture made from light-colored woods. Usually I would wait patiently while Dorek Bujnicki attended to the students at his little window, after which we showed each other our poems and dreamed up literary pranks. There was a Lithuanian who also used to hang around there—Pranas Ancewicz. We were close friends and there was a time when we saw each other every day, because we both lived in the student house on Bouffałowa Hill. Now that I've mentioned his name I cannot refrain from remarking that I know of very few people who have been slandered the way that wise and good man was. And no one knows better than I that they were all barefaced lies.

The Institute is for me the period just before my departure for Paris and immediately after my return, 1934 and 1935, a period of dramas and intoxications, also of travels. Perhaps, aside from strictly personal causes, one might detect in this some sort of short-lived opening up in the whole country, between the chaos of the economic crisis and the gathering darkness of the end of the thirties, a soaring, along with, to be sure, a presentiment of the approaching terror. I received a literary fellowship to Paris. Nika, a woman I had met in the Institute and had become friendly with, went to Moscow on a fellowship. The first book of poems by Boris Pasternak that I read,

[3]The green border divided Soviet-occupied Poland from German-occupied Poland.

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Vtoroe rozhdenie (Second Birth), was a gift from her. Just about that time Pasternak traveled abroad for the last time, to Paris, to the Congress in Defense of Culture, but he was in a tenuous position and was no longer being published.

The entrance to the Calf Pen was directly across from Arsenal Street. I had all sorts of experiences along the boulevard that led to Royal Street, but there are no sentimental memories associated with this garden. Open to passersby like a public square, it was not considered a congenial place for conversations or for holding hands, because the sight of all the nannies and the soldiers crowded together on its benches cast something of a pall on the splendid repetitiveness of such occupations. Probably my most detailed memories of the garden's recesses are from my childhood, from daytime games, when it was still neglected and practically empty.

Bakszta Street

Never in my Wilno years did I stop to consider why this street bore this name. The word was vaguely associated with *baszta,* or tower, which is correct. Bakszta was a very old, dark, narrow street, with horrible ruts in the roadway, no wider than two or three meters in some spots, and with deep open gutters. As a child I was rather afraid to venture into it because it had a bad reputation: right after you turned onto Bakszta from Grand Street you passed a multistory building with white-painted windows—the hospital for venereal diseases. At the upper windows sat whores who were there for a compulsory cure, mocking the passersby and screaming ugly words. It is not because it was so widespread that prostitution in Wilno is worth paying attention to; this oldest of human professions shows no signs of disappearing anywhere, it just changes its form. In Wilno, prostitution maintained completely nineteenth-century forms, or rather,

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nineteenth-century Russian forms, just as in Dostoyevski's novels. That is, the drinking bouts of officers and students in exclusively masculine company would end with trips "to the girls," to the numerous little brothels whose addresses were known by every cabby. On certain streets (especially those below Bakszta on the Wilenka River, such as Łotoczki Street, Safjaniki, etc.), creatures of the female sex would stand in front of the gates for hours, adapting to the rigors of the climate, so that in winter they wrapped themselves up in woolen scarves, wore thick felt boots or tall leather boots, and stamped their feet in the snow to keep warm. The reservoir for this working force, just as for servant girls, was the countryside or the wooden outskirts of the city, which were not too different from the villages.

But, more than anything, Bakszta was Barbara. Here and there, especially from the direction of the hillsides and bluffs near the Wilenka, a pedestrian looking in through the gates would see large courtyards and gardens; one of these sprawling estates was the Romer House. If I am not mistaken, my first journey from Niewiaża to Wilno ended there, because we used horses and the Romers' courtyard, outfitted with a stable and a carriage house, made a good stopping place. The journey was a long one, 120 kilometers, and its significance is not in the least diminished by the fact that later I learned to drive that same distance by car in an hour. That is why we stopped at the Romers'; I don't know what social ties there were between us. In any event, later, throughout my entire stay at the gymnasium, the Romer House was managed by Barbara, a housekeeper, and a majordomo. Barbara came from my part of the country, even somewhat deeper into Samogitia, from the environs of Krakinów, and she had once served as my grandfather's senior housekeeper; we preserved a certain intimacy on the basis of these ties, and Barbara frequently visited us on Foothills Street. Tall, erect, severe, thin-lipped, she looked like so many of those numerous dark-haired and

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dark-eyed Lithuanians. An old maid, a pious woman, and a fanatical Lithuanian—the older people in our household used to make fun of these traits of hers, but gently. In all of Wilno only one church, St. Michael's, held Lithuanian masses (that is, sermons and singing in that language) and naturally Barbara went to mass only there. Anyway, most of the faithful there were servants. I used to smile when, many years later, I would listen to my Viennese Parisian friends' stories about Czech towns under the Habsburg monarchy. Naturally, German was spoken there, and Czech was considered the language of the household servants. I knew that only too well, except that in our eastern region Polish took the place of German.

From what I am saying about Barbara it is not easy to make any inferences about the strength of my emotional attachment. However, her image has accompanied me on my wanderings across a couple of continents. There must be a reason for someone surviving this firmly in our imagination. I remember Barbara's lodgings in Szetejnie, which were as severe as she was, and this undoubtedly long-dead person has remained for me one of the most important figures from my early childhood.

Since it was so close to the university, almost directly across from the corner of Grand and St. John's Streets, Bakszta played an important role in the students' lives, because that is where the *mensa* was located. Not a dining room, not a cheap restaurant, not a cafeteria, not a canteen, not "a place of collective eating," but precisely: a *mensa.* It was one of the student union's chief undertakings; the free or reduced-price dinner coupons served as a stake in the political struggles for power. A rather dingy, dark building, it apparently housed the seminarists' dormitory at one time; for many years it was the only student house in Wilno—before the second one, very modern, was built on Bouffałowa Hill. I never lived on Bakszta, but every now and then I ventured into its corridors with their blackened and well-worn wooden

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floors, in order to visit my classmates. The smell of lye, naphtha, soapsuds, tobacco. A similar corridor, on the ground floor, led to the *mensa.* I have only a hazy recollection of its tables, covered with stained tablecloths (or was it oilcloth?), but I can see very clearly the small cashier's table at the entrance where one bought tickets for individual dishes. Almost always they were sold by a little gnome with a withered face, wearing a fantastic floppy black bow instead of a tie: Gasiulis.[4] A so-called eternal student, an already legendary personality because he was active in student organizations in prehistoric times, perhaps even in 1922 or 1923. In the Vagabonds' Club he was respected as an elder, as one of the founders; it was from his era that certain songs dated, quite obviously inspired by Kipling's *Jungle Book,* which was idolized at that time. ("On a high hill the baboons were dancing their wild dance.") Today I think that Gasiulis, like all the members of the Vagabonds' Club, was very much a hippie. Our wide black berets with colorful tassels made fun of the generally accepted head coverings. On the other hand, his black ascot came straight out of the bohemia of Young Poland, as did the cape of the popular city scoutmaster: skinny, sad-faced Puciata. Despite his pure Lithuanian surname, I don't think that Gasiulis knew Lithuanian. At one time he had wandered through various distant regions, perhaps he even had lived for a while in Kraków or Poznań—I could never find this out because the difference in generations precluded familiarity with such a celebrated, even if somewhat comic, figure.

Foundry Street

Foundry Street equals walking downhill. Many a time, innumerable times, over the course of many years, because I usually lived in the newest part of the

[4]Executed by the Soviet authorities for tearing down official posters.

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city, beyond Zawalna and Wileńska Streets, and it was Foundry Street that led from there to Napoleon Square and beyond, to the university or to bustling Grand Street. A triumphal descent, the ecstasy of physical exertion, the happiness of long, almost dancing steps, or absolute despair, or else, probably most often, that spiritual state when the young organism rejoices in its own way, despite the delusions of its tormented imagination. The descent began at the building on the corner of Wileńska, where the meeting halls of the professional unions and other similar institutions were located. A colorful array of notices was posted there, announcing lectures and boxing matches; fans of these performances, mainly young Jews, used to gather in groups on the sidewalk. A little farther down, on the right, but not as far as the corner of Tatar Street, were a couple of apartment houses with balconies that meant nothing to me until the moment when I began to spend my spring evenings on one of them with Stanisław Stomma, abandoning myself to intellectual disputes accompanied by rosy sunsets. It was 1929, I was a student in the eighth class at the gymnasium; Stomma, I think, was a second-year student in the law faculty and also an older brother in our lodge—the conspiratorial group pet. "Lodge" is an exaggeration, but I cannot think of our group or of the Vagabonds' Club, which I joined shortly afterward, other than as the peculiar creations of Wilno, the city of Freemasonry. Just as during the period of Wilno University's preeminence, prior to 1830, when many of our city's luminaries belonged to the Masonic lodges and rumors about this circulated freely, although I found out how numerous were the Masons among us only many years later. Unfortunately, the right-wing press erred in ascribing to Masonry a decisive influence on the course of historical events.

So, with Stomma on a balcony above a ravine of a street that descended towards tree-lined squares. We argued about Petrażycki, into whose theory of law and morality Stomma was being initiated by a young profes-

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sor, a fanatic Petrażyckyist, a certain Lande.[5] Having heard about Petrażycki, I, in turn, began reading some of his writings. We also argued about Henri de Massis's book, which was quite popular then—*La défense de l'Occident* [*Defense of the West,* trans., 1928]. At the time I was devoting myself wholeheartedly to studying French in order to read French authors in the original. It was probably Stomma from whom I borrowed the Massis, and over thirty years later, in California, I still appreciated his lending me that book. This does not mean that I was ever, then or now, attracted to the French nationalists, the heirs of the monarchy. One must admit, however, that they were the first to sound the alarm, alerting people to the presence of ergot, the black discoloration that had begun to contaminate thought and language. According to them, this disease would arise in Asia and spread to the European mentality through the intermediary of Germany in particular; after 1918, through Weimar Germany—Schopenhauerism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Spengler, Keyserling, Massis and other defenders of the Cartesian trenches were unable to ward off the growing opaqueness of the French language under the influence of German philosophy, which, by the way, was not necessarily an import from the Orient. Who knows, perhaps my distaste for the "wisdom of the East" that is sweeping California can be explained by the fact that I read those early warnings when I was seventeen years old.

Past the corner of Tatar Street, on the right there was the open space of a plaza; on the left, some small shops, unremembered, and a restaurant or cafeteria that opened during the second half of my time at the university,

[5]Leon Petrażycki (1867–1931), Polish philosopher and sociologist of law, was a professor at Petersburg University and, after 1917, at Warsaw University. Dr. Lande taught at the Stefan Batory University in Wilno, then at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He was a follower of "the Petrażycki School."

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where one got good-tasting dinners for sixty *groszy.* The owner was a Warsaw Jew, the clientele was made up of students, but for the most part they were not the same students whom one saw in the *mensa.* Here I met my Jewish classmates from the law faculty, who came mainly from Warsaw; Lithuanians and Belorussians also gathered here. I do not know why my memory has preserved only a few faces and names. One of them: my colleague Lerner.

A few more steps took one past the Church of the Bonifraters (the Brothers of the Order of St. John the Divine). It was the lowest church in Wilno, and the church itself plus the monastery buildings, which were also low, formed a kind of miniature fortress on a small square that was full of trees—lindens, I think. The Brothers ran some sort of charitable enterprise; at one time, they had an institution for the mentally ill, which is why if someone talked nonsense, we would say that he was fit for the Brothers. The church had two little towers but, in keeping with the nature of the whole building, they were mere curves, just two breasts on the building. The interior was like a crypt or grotto decorated in baroque style, with a small spring-fed well more or less in the center of its elongated rectangular space. Miraculous healing properties were ascribed to the water from this spring; although its fame did not extend even to other parts of the city, its reputation continued to be useful within the parish. What was special about the Church of the Bonifraters was the way it gave one a sense of security, of the homeliness of divine-human affairs, of an impregnable shelter from the world. Later—after Poland—I had occasion to visit Eastern Orthodox churches, which are like little chests made of gold, or cells of beeswax, where the warm radiance of the walls, the smell of incense, and the liturgical songs have a hypnotic effect. No doubt this fulfills a human need for an enclosed, delineated space, subject to its own laws, and fenced off from that other, limitless, space. That was why I loved the

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Brothers; particularly at Easter, when people visited the tombs, it would not do to pass by that church. If in the other churches Christ's tomb, displayed with more or less ingenuity, vanished beneath the high vaulted ceilings, was diminished in comparison with the altar and the columns, in the Church of the Brothers of the Order of St. John the Divine it was the central place, because everything there was practically on the same level as the floor. I almost forgot to add that Foundry Street turned into the Street of the Bonifraters near that small square.

German Street

Narrow and not too long, German Street was the most cosmopolitan of Wilno's streets, because the street that was supposed to be the main street was definitely not cosmopolitan. It was officially named Świętojerski (St. George's) Boulevard at first, then Mickiewicz Boulevard; less officially, it was known as St. George's Street, or Georgie (Jerek) for short. This thoroughfare, laid out with a straightedge and bordered by rows of apartment houses from the second half of the nineteenth century, did not elevate Wilno any higher than a provincial town, a Rennes or an Elizavetgrad, as I imagine it, where there must also have been a boulevard for the officers' and students' *gulianie.*[6] By contrast, German Street's cosmopolitan aspect was not diminished by its cobblestone roadway, which was repaved with bricks (as were all the important streets) only in the 1930s. As one approached German Street one left the underpopulated area and penetrated into a region of sudden density. Sidewalks, gates, doors, windows all sprouted multitudes of faces and seemed to bulge from the crowds. It seemed that on German Street every house concealed an infinite number of inhabitants who engaged in every possible trade. Be-

[6]*Gulianie*—Russian: carousing.

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neath enormous painted signs, shop after shop fronted on the street, but the faces of lions, the pictures of stockings of monstrous proportions, of gloves and corsets, also advertised shops inside the courtyards, while the tablets inside the gates gave information about dentists, seamstresses, hosiers, pleaters, shoemakers, and so forth. Trade also overflowed from the buildings into the roadway; it seethed around the pushcarts and the stalls that were erected at intervals in recesses along the sidewalks. Loaded carts, pulled by straining horses, thundered past. Touts circulated among the passersby; their job was to spot potential customers, praise the goods and conduct those people they had managed to corral to a shop that often was located somewhere in a distant inner courtyard. I am positive that I never connected German Street with the illustrations in my French school texts that depicted nineteenth-century Paris; I arrived at that comparison slowly, only when I was already a permanent resident of France. In the second half of our century, when it no longer exists, I have often thought about German Street, particularly when I wander about in the Marais district, staring at the signboards, especially since several of them practically beg to be remembered. For example, the one from the rue de Turenne on which to this day Monsieur Szatan recommends his tailoring establishment for men's suits.

German Street was exclusively Jewish, but it was significantly different from Warsaw's Nalewki, for example. More old-fashioned, more settled, it acted as the representative of a whole labyrinth of twisting, astonishingly narrow medieval alleys, and I never felt that hidden background in Warsaw. Taking into consideration the presence of stones that bore the patina of time, Wilno's cosmopolitan fragments were probably closer to Paris than to Warsaw.

I visited German Street at various stages of my life, above all as a little boy accompanying Grandmother Miłosz. We were living in an apartment house at 5

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Foothills Street, so we would walk down Foothills to the corner of Sierakowski Street, then along Port Street to Wileńska. Sierakowski Street demands a digression. At that time one could still see veterans of the 1863 uprising; they wore uniforms and cornered hats, which were navy blue with raspberry-colored rims. They received a modest pension and even the widows of these veterans were not excluded, although of course it only amounted to pennies. Grandmother Miłosz also received such a pension. The street named after Sierakowski[7] led to the Łukiszki district, to the square where the leader of the uprising in Lithuania was hanged. My grandfather fought under Sierakowski in 1863, as his adjutant or officer for special commissions, I am not absolutely certain, in any event he was a close collaborator and was saved because in Serbiny, his family estate near Wędziagoła (north of Kaunas), he had as neighbors a village of Old Believers who liked him very much. The elders gathered and debated for an entire night over a by-no-means trivial problem: does a Christian have the right to swear a false oath in order to save a life? And they swore under oath that he had never left home throughout 1863.

From Foothills, across Sierakowski, then down Port Street to Wileńska and German Streets—always to Sora Kłok's store. The store was in the courtyard, but it didn't need signs or touts; it was famous in the city and had a faithful clientele. It was well known that buttons, linings, wadding, and similar items such as no other shop carried could always be found there. I was fascinated by Mrs. Sora Kłok herself—hideously ugly, fat, a faded redhead in a wig, with her goiter and her obviously shaved chin. She only commanded the troop of salesgirls; she was very imperious. From her store came the so-called tailors' supplements for my suits, which were either continually made over or sewn from homespun to leave room for

[7]Zygmunt Sierakowski (1827–63). A Polish officer based in St. Petersburg, he was one of the leaders of the 1863 uprising.

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growing. Shall I reveal the secret of habits I acquired in childhood? To this day a conditioned reflex takes over whenever I buy a suit: I'd better get it one size larger, because what if I should outgrow it?

After my boyhood years there is a big gap in my relations with German Street; I passed by there from time to time, and that's all. Only toward the end of my stay at the university did I begin to establish contact with it, attending guest performances of a Yiddish theater or visiting the little restaurants on its side streets with Pranas Ancewicz. The taste of chilled vodka and marvelous herring, but also the sensation of human warmth, dimly preserved in memory, guaranteed that I would always like Jewish restaurants. The jumble of side streets near German Street is worth mentioning, too, because that is where I sought out a rabbi in order to fulfill a certain errand. Namely, in 1933 or 1934 Oscar Milosz sent me three copies of his little book from Paris; he had published it privately in a very small number of copies. Considering its contents, it is not at all surprising that he did not intend this work for sale. *L'Apocalypse de St. Jean déchiffrée*—the book I'm talking about—prophesied catastrophes of cosmic dimensions that were supposed to strike humanity around the year 1944. It is possible, after all, that there were two pamphlets, not one—the other essay (either bound together with the first or separate) proposed the hypothesis that the most ancient fatherland of the Jews was located on the Iberian peninsula and only there, and nowhere else, should one look for the Biblical Eden. From this work, *Les origines ibériques du peuple juif,* it appeared that the Jews are, most likely, the oldest autochthonous people of Europe. So, one copy was for me and the others I was supposed to give to the (in my opinion) two most appropriate individuals—one a Christian and the other a Jew, if possible one of the "illustrious rabbis." I selected Professor Marian Zdziechowski because his pessimism about the future of Europe seemed to make him relatively open to gloomy prophecies. But

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I did not know Zdziechowski personally. As luck would have it, I approached him, stammering and blushing, on the steps of the university library, without having been properly introduced, and met with such an unresponsive welcome that it seems I didn't hand him the copy. Who the most famous rabbi was and on what grounds I selected him, I do not recall. I gave the copy to his secretary. I shall never know if it was read and if the author's intention—to issue a warning—was fulfilled.

L'Apocalypse de St. Jean déchiffrée is a bibliophilic rarity and my next adventure connected with this text took place many years after the death of Oscar Milosz, in 1952, in the vicinity of the rue Vaugirard, where I was living at the time. I had run into Henry Miller in a small restaurant; I was astounded when I heard that he had been searching for this text for a long time. I promised to get him a copy, which wasn't at all difficult, since the Collection Doucet collects Milosziana. I did not keep my promise and Miller excoriated me for that. Why didn't I keep it? It simply slipped my mind, but I suspect that the causes must have gone deeper than that and Miller rightly saw in it a reason to take offense. In my conversation with him I found his California catastrophism terribly distasteful: that's all we need, as if we don't have enough problems coping with the heritage of our European catastrophism. I detected intellectual chaos in what he said, and in his greediness for apocalyptic texts I saw a lust for sensationalism. So it cannot be ruled out that my resistance had a sacral character to it: I did not consider Miller to be one of the chosen to whom Oscar Milosz had once wanted to issue his warning.

Wileńska

A street with a strange name, not homogeneous, changing form every dozen or so steps, ecumenical to boot, Catholic-Jewish. At its beginning (or end) at the

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Green Bridge, it was wide, lacking a distinctive consistency, for there were no more than a couple of apartment houses at the outlets of the various side streets; it constricted into a narrow throat beyond the intersection with Świętojerska (or Mickiewicz) Street. When I was a child, the foundations of an unfinished building sat there for a long time until at last a huge edifice was erected, a department store owned by the Jabłkowski brothers, the first more or less "universal" store in Wilno, several stories high.

Not far from the Jabłkowskis', across from the Helios movie theater, was an amazing haberdashery, the likes of which I never saw anywhere else in the city. Its owners were not Jews but Poles from somewhere far away in Galicia, distinguished from ordinary people by their speech and their exaggerated politeness. The family: two women and a man, a family triangle, it seems. The man smelled of eau de cologne, his slightly curled hair was parted and combed smooth, his hands were white and puffy. They said, "I kiss your hand." And the shop did not remind one at all of what was normally meant by "a shop"; the gleaming parquet floor was polished so that there wasn't a speck of dust on it; the goods were in glass cases.

Next door to this shop was a small bookstore, where every year on the first of September I experienced strong emotions, jostling against the other pupils and buying my new school books. Without a doubt, one of the most powerful experiences is to only look and touch for the moment, without knowing what is hidden under the colorful dust jackets.

Across the street, as I said before, was the Helios movie theater, remembered along with various films seen there, among them Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia,* which made a powerful impression on me. But this theater also has remained in my memory as a symbol that reminds me of a vague feeling of disgust and shame that has been pushed away to a level deeper than conscious-

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ness. Among Witold's many unsuccessful careers (before he died of tuberculosis at age thirty-six)—his service in the Borderland Defense Corps, for example, his participation in a Jewish fur-trading cooperative, etc.—there was also an attempt at founding a cabaret review. The premiere took place in the hall of the Helios and I, a fourteen-year-old boy at the time, was unable to defend myself against the bawdy vulgarity of this show by any rational judgment; hence the shame—because of Witold who, like it or not, belonged to the family, and also because of my parents, who even laughed—remained undiminished, spreading like a greasy stain.

On the same side of the street, right behind the movie theater, Rutski's bookstore was to serve as a kind of counterweight much later on. The son of the dignified, dour Mr. Rutski was my colleague at the university and was married to Sitka Danecka; my relations with Sitka, before then, testify optimistically to the diversity of human relationships and the freedom from form that is possible every now and then. We used to go on kayaking trips together, and we felt so comfortable with each other that we forgot about the difference in our sex. We were not, however, just colleagues; we were linked by a much warmer mutual heartfelt caring. Nonetheless, no form compelled us into erotic intimacies; friendship was more precious.

Beyond Halpern's shop (I think that was his name) where there was dust, semidarkness, a wealth of dyes, pencils, paper in many colors, notebooks, Wileńska Street, now even narrower, turned into a street of Christian harness makers, cobblers, tailors; there was even a Turkish bakery. From it, or perhaps from another, came my gymnasium colleague, Czebi-Ogły, who was a Muslim. Next, the facades of the buildings became subdivided into a multitude of little Jewish shops, and after a momentary rise in dignity across from the little square near the Church of St. Catherine (there was a beautiful old store there that carried hunting guns), Wileńska was

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dominated by impoverished trade all the way to the intersection of Trocka, Dominican and German Streets.

From a courtyard on Wileńska, in its artisan section, one entered a lending library to which Grandmother Miłosz had a subscription paid for out of her modest pension. I often turned up there, either delegated by her or to borrow books for myself, when I was twelve, thirteen. Mostly Żeromski, Rodziewiczówna, Szpyrkówna, that is to say, bad literature, and it seems to me that a tolerable intelligence in someone who received such training should not be underrated, with a few points added for the obstacles that he must have had to overcome. In all languages, belles lettres are predominantly kitsch and melodrama; however, the accidents of Polish history decreed that fiction had an exceptionally powerful effect on people's minds, as a language and as a sensibility, so that I suspect there is in the so-called Polish soul an exceptionally rich underpinning of kitsch. As for me—let's be frank: in the books that I borrowed from the library I was enchanted by such scenes as the death of the beautiful Helen in *Ashes,* who threw herself into a ravine,[8] and perhaps even more so by the ending of a certain story that was translated from the French about the Chouans, or the counterrevolutionaries in the Vendée.[9] The hero's head is sliced off on the guillotine, but that does not put an end to his highly emotional adventures. To this day I can remember the last sentence. "But his head, still rolling around, whispered, 'Amelia!' "

Berkeley, 1967

—Verse translation from the Polish by the author, Robert Hass, Robert Pinsky and Renata Gorczynski. Prose translation by Madeline Levine.

[8]*Ashes* (*Popioły,* 1904), a historical novel by Stefan Żeromski.
[9]Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chouans.*

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from The Runaway Soul

Harold Brodkey

1930

I was slapped and hurried along in the private applause of birth—I think I remember this. Well, I imagine it anyway—the blind boy's rose-and-milk-and-gray-walled (and salty) aquarium, the aquarium overthrown, the uproar in the woman-barn . . . the fantastic sloppiness of one's coming into existence, one's early election, one's senses in the radiant and raw stuff of howlingly sore and unexplained registry in the new everywhere, immensely unknown, disbelief and shakenness, the awful contamination of actual light. I think I remember the breath crouched in me and then leaping out yowlingly: this uncancellable sort of beginning.

The other birth—of a mind shaped like a person—all that skull buzz and mumble—a mind starting up, a mind that wants so much to know the truth that it makes the effort and takes the shape of a boy—and comes into

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existence: only a first draft at first, sketchy, watercolored, clichéd—cardboard air, a symbolic wrist, a painted eyebrow—a tattered, half-real boy as proud as a mind: an apple-eater in an unspecific light: two differently born creatures, one guy. Imagine the twists of suspense in being in two different autobiographical narratives at the same time. Think of all the myths of single meanings . . . of there being a single line of one's own history.

And then to be born in two sharply divergent ways, if I humor the hypothesis of two births, if I admit I sense MYSELF as a consciousness, a more or less consciously *alphabetical* gesticulating shadow—but real-seeming—and real, as real as real, but as only partly filled in, not to others but to myself, two days old, two years old, five years old, fourteen, fifty, sixty . . . Well, imagine a shadow-consciousness imagining itself a sleeping fourteen-year-old boy, real in St. Louis County in the month of May. That would be 1944. A boy, ill once, who in his delirium felt himself to be triply born, quadruply born, to be a son of illness, nutty with delirium (and near death), and a son of luck and recovering to be a body and a mind, a difficulty born descendant of Adam born once more . . .

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Harold Brodkey's stories have appeared regularly in *The New Yorker, Esquire,* and the *American Review.* He is the author of two collections of short fiction, *First Love and Other Sorrows* (1958) and *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode* (1988). The excerpt in this issue is the opening section of his long-awaited novel *The Runaway Soul*, which will be published in November by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Larry Brown's most recent works are *Big Bad Love,* a collection of stories, and *Dirty Work,* a novel. His novel *Joe* will be published in October by Algonquin Books.

Kim Edwards won the Nelson Algren Award in 1990. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares, The North American Review* and *Michigan Quarterly Review.* She spent the past four years in Japan and Malaysia, coordinating a SUNY-Buffalo language program.

Norman Mailer's most recent novel is *Tough Guys Don't Dance.* He contributes regularly to *Vanity Fair* magazine. The piece in this issue is an excerpt from his novel *Harlot's Ghost,* which is forthcoming from Random House.

POETRY

Agha Shahid Ali, a poet from Kashmir, India, teaches English and creative writing at Hamilton College. His books of poetry include *The Half-Inch Himalayas, A Walk Through the Yellow Pages* and *A Nostalgist's Map of America,* which is forthcoming from Norton.

Nin Andrews's poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Exquisite Corpse.*

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John Ash has published three volumes of poetry: *Disbelief, The Branching Stairs* and *The Goodbyes.* He was born in England and currently lives in New York City.

Alfred Corn is the author of five books of poems, the most recent of which is *The West Door.* He has also edited a collection of essays entitled *Incarnation: Contemporary Writers on the New Testament.*

Gabrielle Glancy has poems forthcoming in *New American Writing* and *High Plains Literary Review.* She received a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts in 1990 and is currently living and teaching in San Francisco.

Debora Greger's most recent book of poetry is *The 1002nd Night.* She teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Florida.

Donald Hall was the first poetry editor of *The Paris Review.* His most recent publications are the book-length poem *The One Day* (1988) and *Old and New Poems* (1990), a collection.

Mary Stewart Hammond's first collection of poems, *Out of Canaan,* is forthcoming from Norton in November. Her poems have appeared in *The Atlantic, The New Yorker* and *The Yale Review.*

Jane Hirschfield's most recent books are *Of Gravity and Space* and a cotranslation, *The Ink Dark Moon.* She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and has been published in *The Atlantic, The Nation* and *The Georgia Review.*

Kenneth Koch is the author of *One Thousand Avant-Garde Plays* (1988) and of the libretto for *The Construction,* which was produced in 1990.

James Lasdun's most recent works are *A Jump Start,* a collection of poetry, and *Delirium Eclipse and Other Stories.* A new collection of short stories is forthcoming from Farrar, Straus & Giroux. He teaches in the New York University writing program.

John Lindgren is a resident of Santa Cruz. His poems have appeared in *Chelsea* and *The Sewanee Review.*

Sandra McPherson's most recent collection of poems is *Streamers* (1988). She teaches at the University of California at Davis.

Cynthia Nadelman's poems have appeared in *Pequod* and *The Gettysburg Review.* She is an art critic and is currently working on a biography of her grandfather, the sculptor Elie Nadelman.

Mary Oliver's books include *Twelve Moons, American Primitive* (for which she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1984), *Dream Work* and *House of Light.* She is currently the Marjorie Banister Writer in Residence at Sweet Briar College.

Charles Simic's most recent books are *The Book of Gods and Devils* and *The World Doesn't End,* for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990.

John Updike won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award for his most recent novel, *Rabbit at Rest. Odd Jobs,* a collection of essays and criticism, will be published in November by Knopf.

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INTERVIEWS

Olga Carlisle (Wright Morris interview) conducted the Boris Pasternak and Arthur Miller interviews for *The Paris Review.* Her most recent works include *Island in Time* and *Solzhenitsyn and the Secret Circles.* **Jodie Ireland** is a graduate of the University of Chicago. She lives in Santa Barbara. The photographs accompanying the interview are reprinted with permission of the author and the University of Nebraska Press.
Peter Stitt's interview with Donald Hall is his sixth interview for *The Paris Review.* He is the author of *The World's Hieroglyphic Beauty: Five American Poets* and the editor of *The Gettysburg Review.* He is currently working on a biography of James Wright.

FEATURES

Czeslaw Milosz was born in 1911 in Lithuania. Since 1961 he has been professor of Slavic languages and literatures at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1978 Milosz received the Neustadt International Prize for literature. In 1980 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. His translator, **Madeline Levine,** is professor of Slavic literatures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She was a 1988 recipient of the PEN translation award.
Geoffrey Wolff's most recent novels, *Providence* and *The Final Club,* will be reprinted in the fall by Vintage Books. "The Sick Man of Europe" is excerpted from *A Day at the Beach,* a book of recollections to be published in March 1992 by Knopf.

ART

Jack Balas was born in Chicago in 1955 and lives in Boulder, Colorado. His photographs and paintings have been exhibited at the Koslow Gallery, Los Angeles; Artspace, San Francisco; and Boulder Center for the Visual Arts, Colorado.
Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in Guaimaro, Cuba, in 1957, and lives in New York. His work has recently been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The New Museum, New York; and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York.
Donald Moffett was born in 1955 and lives in New York. His work is shown at Simon Watson, New York; Wessel O'Connor Ltd., New York; and Texas Gallery, Houston.

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"The great gift is the passion for reading. It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind. It is a moral illumination."

—Elizabeth Hardwick,
in *The Paris Review*

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Calendar of Readings 1991-92 Readings take place on Mondays, except as noted.

October	7	Writers-at-Work Live Interview: **Alice Walker** is interviewed by **Barbara Christian**
	7	**Alice Walker** reads from her work
	14	**Adrienne Rich**
	21	**Mordecai Richler**
	28	**A.S. Byatt** and **Diane Johnson**
November	4	**Eudora Welty**
	11	**Charles Johnson** and **Paule Marshall**
	18	**Les Murray** and **Christopher Logue**
	21	**Ved Mehta** (Thurs.)
	25	**Andrei Voznesensky**
December	2	**Ellen Bryant Voigt** and **Jane Flanders**
	7	WORLD WAR II: LITERATURE AND EXPERIENCE with **Joseph Heller, Samuel Hynes, Mary Lee Settle, Louis Simpson, William Styron** (Sat.)
	9	Writers-at-Work Live Interview: **Ryszard Kapuscinski** is interviewed by **Scott Malcomson**
	9	**Ryszard Kapuscinski** and **Peter Schneider** read from their work
	16	**Lars Gustafsson** and **Michael Ondaatje**
	22	**Joseph Brodsky, Anthony Hecht** and **Mona Van Duyn** (Sun.)
January	6	STATE OF THE ARTS I: AMERICAN FICTION with **Toni Cade Bambara, Stanley Elkin, Mary Gordon, Allan Gurganus, Maxine Hong Kingston, Robert Stone** and moderator **Paul Auster**
	9	**J.G. Ballard** and **Tobias Wolff** (Thurs.)
	12	**Robertson Davies** (Sun.)
	13	**Fay Weldon** and **A.N. Wilson**
	27	STATE OF THE ARTS II: AMERICAN DRAMA with **Robert Brustein, John Guare, Arthur Kopit, Wendy Wasserstein, George C. Wolfe** and moderator **Rocco Landesman**
February	3	**David Grossman**
	10	**Michael Frayn** in a reading and in conversation with **Calvin Trillin**
	16	**Spalding Gray** reads from his forthcoming novel (Sun.)
	24	THE TENTH MUSE I: **Robert Pinsky** introduces **Mark Halliday, Marie Howe** and **Tom Sleigh**
March	2	STATE OF THE ARTS III: AMERICAN POETRY with **Marilyn Hacker, Michael Harper, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, Brad Leithauser, Katha Pollitt** and moderator **Sven Birkerts**
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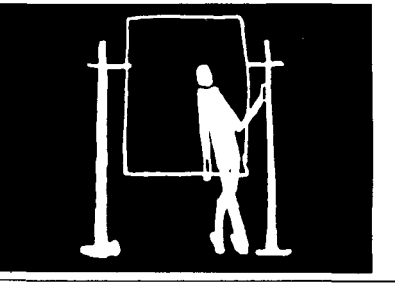

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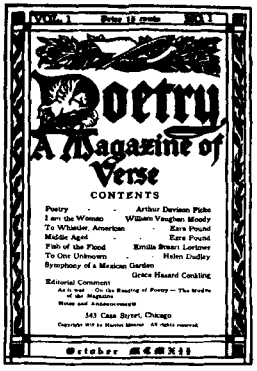

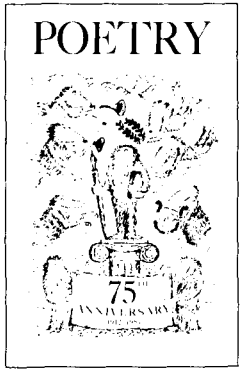

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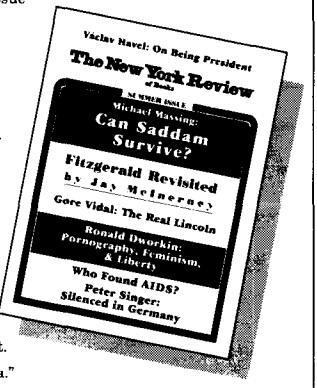

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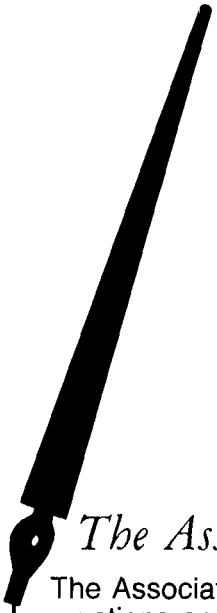

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